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SOUTH WIND

SOUTH WIND

BY NORMAN · DOUGLAS

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BY JOHN AUSTEN

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SOUTH WIND

Volume I

Chapter I

The bishop was feeling rather sea-sick. Confoundedly sea-sick, in fact.

This annoyed him. For he disapproved of sickness in every shape or form. His own state of body was far from satisfactory at that moment; Africa—he was Bishop of Bampopo in the Equatorial Regions—had played the devil with his lower gastric department and made him almost an invalid; a circumstance of which he was nowise proud, seeing that ill-health led to inefficiency in all walks of life. There was nothing he despised more than inefficiency. Well or ill, he always insisted on getting through his tasks in a businesslike fashion. That was the way to live, he used to say. Get through with it. Be perfect of your kind, whatever that kind may be. Hence his sneaking fondness for the natives—they were such fine, healthy animals.

Fine, healthy animals; perfect of their kind! Africa liked them to "get through with it" ac-

cording to their own lights. But there was evidently a little touch of spitefulness and malice about Africa; something almost human. For when white people try to get through with it after their particular fashion, she makes hay of their livers or something. That is what had happened to Thomas Heard, D.D., Bishop of Bampopo. He had been so perfect of his kind, such an exemplary pastor, that there was small chance of a return to the scenes of his Episcopal labours. Anybody could have told him what would happen. He ought to have allowed for a little human weakness, on the part of the Black Continent. It could not be helped. For the rest, he was half inclined to give up the Church and take to some educational work on his return to England. Perhaps that was why he at present preferred to be known as "Mr. Heard." It put people at their ease, and him too.

Whence now this novel and unpleasant sensation in the upper gastric region? Most annoying! He had dined discreetly at his hotel the evening before; had breakfasted with moderation. And had he not voyaged in many parts of the world, in China Seas and round the Cape? Was he not even then on his return journey from Zanzibar? No doubt. But the big liner which deposited him yesterday at the thronged port was a different concern from this wretched tub, reeking with indescribable odours as it rolled in the oily swell of the past storm through which the *Mozambique* had ridden without a tremor. The benches, too, were frightfully un-

comfortable, and sticky with sirocco moisture under the breathless awning. Above all, there was the unavoidable spectacle of the suffering passengers, natives of the country; it infected him with misery. In attitudes worthy of Michelangelo they sprawled about the deck, groaning with anguish; huddled up in corners with a lemon—prophylactic against sea-sickness, apparently—pressed to faces which, by some subtle process of colour-adaptation, had acquired the complexion of the fruit; tottering to the taff-rail. . . .

There was a peasant woman dressed in black, holding an infant to her breast. Both child and parent suffered to a distressing degree. By some kindly dispensation of Providence they contrived to be ill in turns, and the situation might have verged on the comical but for the fact that blank despair was written on the face of the mother. She evidently thought her last day had come, and still, in the convulsions of her pain, tried to soothe the child. An ungainly creature, with a big scar across one cheek. She suffered dumbly, like some poor animal. The bishop's heart went out to her. . . .

He took out his watch. Two more hours of discomfort to be gone through! Then he looked over the water. The goal was far distant.

Viewed from the clammy deck on this bright morning, the island of Nepenthe resembled a cloud. It was a silvery speck upon that limitless expanse of blue sea and sky. A south wind breathed over the Mediterranean waters, drawing up their moisture

which lay couched in thick mists about its flanks and uplands. The comely outlines were barely suggested through a veil of fog. An air of irreality hung about the place. Could this be an island? A veritable island of rocks and vineyards and houses —this pallid apparition? It looked like some snowy sea-bird resting upon the waves; a sea-bird or a cloud; one of those lonely clouds that stray from their fellows and drift about in wayward fashion at the bidding of every breeze.

All the better-class natives had disappeared below save an unusually fat young priest with a face like a full moon, who pretended to be immersed in his breviary but was looking out of the corner of his eye all the time at a pretty peasant-girl reclining uncomfortably in a corner. He rose and arranged the cushions to her liking. In doing so he must have made some funny remark in her ear, for she smiled wanly as she said:

"Grazie, Don Francesco."

"Means thank you, I suppose," thought the bishop. "But why is he a don?"

Of the other alien travellers, those charming but rather metallic American ladies had retired to the cabin; so had the English family; so had everybody, in fact. On deck there remained of the foreign contingent nobody but himself and Mr. Muhlen, a flashy overdressed personage who seemed to relish the state of affairs. He paced up and down, cool as a cucumber, trying to walk like a sailor, and blandly indifferent to the agonized fellow-creatures

whom the movements of the vessel caused him to touch, every now and then, with the point of his patent-leather boots. Patent-leather boots. That alone classes him, thought Mr. Heard. Once he paused and remarked, in his horrible pronunciation of English:

"That woman over there with the child! I wonder what I would do in her place? Throw it into the water, I fancy. It's often the only way of getting rid of a nuisance."

"Rather a violent measure," replied the bishop politely.

"You're not feeling very well, sir?" he continued, with a fine assumption of affability. "I am so sorry. As for me, I like a little movement of the boat. You know our proverb? Weeds don't spoil. I'm alluding to myself, of course!"

Weeds don't spoil. . . .

Yes, he was a weed. Mr. Heard had not taken kindly to him; he hoped they would not see too much of each other on Nepenthe, which he understood to be rather a small place. A few words of civility over the table d'hôte had led to an exchange of cards—a continental custom which Mr. Heard always resented. It could not easily be avoided in the present case. They had talked of Nepenthe, or rather Mr. Muhlen had talked; the bishop, as usual, preferring to listen and to learn. Like himself, Mr. Muhlen had never before set foot on the place. To be sure, he had visited other Mediterranean islands; he knew Sicily fairly well and had once spent a

pleasant fortnight on Capri. But Nepenthe was different. The proximity to Africa, you know; the volcanic soil. Oh yes! It was obviously quite another sort of island. Business? No! He was not bound on any errand of business; not on any errand at all. Just a little pleasure trip. One owes something to one's self: *n'est-ce pas?* And this early summer was certainly the best time for travelling. One could count on good weather; one could sleep in the afternoon, if the heat were excessive. He had telegraphed for a couple of rooms in what was described as the best hotel—he hoped the visitors staying there would be to his liking. Unfortunately —so he gathered—the local society was a little mixed, a little—how shall we say?—ultra-cosmopolitan. The geographical situation of the island, lying near the converging point of many trade-routes, might account for this. And then its beauty and historical associations: they attracted strange tourists from every part of the world. Queer types! Types to be avoided, perhaps. But what did it matter, after all? It was one of the advantages of being a man, a civilized man, that you could amuse yourself among any class of society. As for himself, he liked the common people, the peasants and fishermen; he felt at home among them; they were so genuine, so refreshingly different.

To suchlike ingratiating and rather obvious remarks the bishop had listened, over the dinner table, with urbane acquiescence and growing distrust. Peasants and fisher folks! This fellow did not look

as if he cared for such company. He was probably a fraud.

They had met again in the evening, and taken a short stroll along the quay where a noisy band was discoursing operatic airs. The performance elicited from Mr. Muhlen some caustic comments on Latin music as contrasted with that of Russia and other countries. He evidently knew the subject. Mr. Heard, to whom music was Greek, soon found himself out of his depths. Later on, in the smoking-room, they had indulged in a game of cards—the bishop being of that broadminded variety which has not the slightest objection to a gentlemanly gamble. Once more his companion had revealed himself as an accomplished amateur.

No; it was something else that annoyed him about the man—certain almost contemptuous remarks he had dropped in the course of the evening on the subject of the female sex; not any particular member of it, but the sex in general. Mr. Heard was sensitive on that point. He was not disheartened by experience. He had never allowed his judgment to be warped by those degrading aspects of womanhood which he had encountered during his work among the London poor, and more recently in Africa, where women are treated as the veriest beasts. He kept his ideals bright. He would tolerate no flippant allusions to the sex. Muhlen's talk had left a bad taste in his mouth.

And here he was, prancing up and down, sublimely pleased with himself. Mr. Heard watched

his perambulations with mixed feelings—moral disapproval combining with a small grain of envy at the fellow's conspicuous immunity from the prevailing sea-sickness.

A weed; unquestionably a weed.

Meanwhile, the mainland slowly receded. Morning wore on, and under the fierce attraction of the sun the fogs were drawn upwards. Nepenthe became tangible—an authentic island. It gleamed with golden rocks and emerald patches of culture. A cluster of white houses, some town or village, lay perched on the middle heights where a playful sunbeam had struck a pathway through the vapours. The curtain was lifted. Half lifted; for the volcanic peaks and ravines overhead were still shrouded in pearly mystery.

The fat priest looked up from his breviary and smiled in friendly fashion.

"I heard you speak English to that person," he began, with hardly a trace of foreign accent. "You will pardon me. I see you are unwell. May I get you a lemon? Or perhaps a glass of cognac?"

"I am feeling better, thank you. It must have been the sight of those poor people that upset me. They seem to suffer horribly. I suppose I have got used to it."

"They do suffer. And they get used to it too. I often wonder whether they are as susceptible to pain and discomfort as the rich with their finer nervous structure. Who can say? Animals also have their sufferings, but they are not encouraged

to tell us about them. Perhaps that is why God made them dumb. Zola, in one of his novels, speaks of a sea-sick donkey."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Heard. It was an old-fashioned trick he had got from his mother. "Dear me!"

He wondered what this youthful ecclesiastic was doing with Zola. In fact, he was slightly shocked. But he never allowed such a state of affairs to be noticed.

"You like Zola?" he queried.

"Not much. He is rather a dirty dog, and his technique is so ridiculously transparent. But one can't help respecting the man. If I were to read this class of literature for my own amusement I would prefer, I think, Catulle Mendès. But I don't. I read it, you understand, in order to be able to penetrate into the minds of my penitents, many of whom refuse to deprive themselves of such books. Women are so influenced by what they read! Personally, I am not very fond of improper writers. And yet they sometimes make one laugh in spite of oneself, don't they? I perceive you are feeling better."

Mr. Heard could not help saying:

"You express yourself very well in English."

"Oh, passably! I have preached to large congregations of Catholics in the United States. In England, too. My mother was English. The Vatican has been pleased to reward the poor labours of my tongue by the title of Monsignor."

"My congratulations. You are rather young for

a Monsignor, are you not? We are apt to associate that distinction with snuff-boxes and gout and——"

"Thirty-nine. It is a good age. One begins to appreciate things at their true value. Your collar! Might I enquire——?"

"Ah, my collar; the last vestige. . . . Yes, I am a bishop. Bishop of Bampopo in Central Africa."

"You are rather young, surely, for a bishop?"

Mr. Heard smiled.

"The youngest on the list, I believe. There were not many applicants for the place; the distance from England, the hard work, and the climate, you know——"

"A bishop. Indeed!"

He waxed thoughtful. Probably he imagined that his companion was telling him some traveller's tale.

"Yes," continued Mr. Heard. "I am what we call a 'Returned Empty.' It is a phrase we apply in England to Colonial bishops who come back from their dioceses."

"Returned Empty! That sounds like beer."

The priest was looking perplexed, as though uncertain of the other's state of mind. Southern politeness, or curiosity, overcame his fears. Perhaps this foreigner was fond of joking. Well, he would humour him.

"You will see our bishop to-morrow," he pursued blandly. "He comes over for the feast of the patron saint; you are lucky in witnessing it. The whole island is decorated. There will be music and fireworks and a grand procession. Our bishop is a dear

old man, though not exactly what you would call a liberal," he added, with a laugh. "That is as it should be, is it not? We like our elders to be conservative. They counteract the often violent modernism of the youngsters. Is this your first visit to Nepenthe?"

"It is. I have heard much about the beauty of the place."

"You will like it. The people are intelligent. There is good food and wine. Our lobsters are celebrated. You will find compatriots on the island, some ladies among them; the Duchess of San Martino, for instance, who happens to be an American; some delightful ladies! And the country girls, too, are worthy of a benevolent glance——"

"That procession is sure to interest me. What is the name of your patron?"

"Saint Dodekanus. He has a wonderful history. There is an Englishman on Nepenthe, Mr. Ernest Eames, a student, who will tell you all about it. He knows more about the saint than I do; one would think he dined with him every evening. But he is a great hermit—Mr. Eames, I mean. And it is so good of our old bishop to come over," he pursued with a shade of emphasis. "His work keeps him mostly on the mainland. He has a large see—nearly thirty square miles. How large, by the way, is your diocese?"

"I cannot give you the exact figures," Mr. Heard replied. "It has often taken me three weeks to travel from one end to the other. It is probably

not much smaller than the kingdom of Italy."

"The kingdom of Italy. Indeed!"

That settled it. The conversation died abruptly; the friendly priest relapsed into silence. He looked hurt and disappointed. This was more than a joke. He had done his best to be civil to a suffering foreigner, and this was his reward—to be fooled with the grossest of fables. Maybe he remembered other occasions when Englishmen had developed a queer sense of humour which he utterly failed to appreciate. A liar. Or possibly a lunatic; one of those harmless enthusiasts who go about the world imagining themselves to be the Pope or the Archangel Gabriel. However that might be, he said not another word, but took to reading his breviary in good earnest, for the first time.

The boat anchored. Natives poured out in a stream. Mr. Muhlen drove up alone, presumably to his sumptuous hotel. The bishop, having gathered his luggage together, followed in another carriage. He enjoyed the drive along that winding upward track; he admired the festal decorations of the houses, the gardens and vineyards, the many-tinted rock scenery overhead, the smiling sun-burnt peasantry. There was an air of contentment and well-being about the place; something joyful, opulent, almost dramatic.

"I like it," he concluded.

And he wondered how long it would be before he met his cousin, Mrs. Meadows, on whose account he had undertaken to break the journey to England.

Don Francesco, the smiling priest, soon outstripped both of them, in spite of a ten minutes' conversation on the quay with the pretty peasant girl of the steamer. He had engaged the fastest driver on the island, and was now tearing frantically up the road, determined to be the first to apprise the Duchess of the lunatic's arrival.

Chapter II

The Duchess of San Martino, a kind-hearted and imposing lady of mature age who, under favourable atmospheric conditions (in winter-time, for instance, when the powder was not so likely to run down her face), might have passed, so far as profile was concerned, for a faded French beauty of bygone centuries—the Duchess was no exception to the rule.

It was an old rule. Nobody knew when it first came into vogue. Mr. Eames, bibliographer of Nepenthe, had traced it down to the second Phœnician period, but saw no reason why the Phœnicians, more than anybody else, should have established the precedent. On the contrary, he was inclined to think that it dated from yet earlier days; days when the Troglodytes, Manigones, Septocardes, Merdones, Anthropophagoi and other hairy aboriginals used to paddle across, in crazy canoes, to barter the produce of their savage African glens

—serpent-skins, and gums, and gazelle horns, and ostrich eggs—for those super-excellent lobsters and peasant girls for which Nepenthe had been renowned from time immemorial. He based this scholarly conjecture on the fact that a gazelle horn, identified as belonging to a now extinct Tripolitan species, was actually discovered on the island, while an adolescent female skull of the hypo-dolichocephalous (Nepenthean) type had come to light in some excavations at Benghazi.

It was a pleasant rule. It ran to the effect that in the course of the forenoon all the inhabitants of Nepenthe, of whatever age, sex, or condition, should endeavour to find themselves in the market-place or piazza—a charming square, surrounded on three sides by the principal buildings of the town and open, on the fourth, to a lovely prospect over land and sea. They were to meet on this spot; there to exchange gossip, make appointments for the evening, and watch the arrival of new-comers to their island. An admirable rule! For it effectively prevented everybody from doing any kind of work in the morning; and after luncheon, of course, you went to sleep. It was delightful to be obliged, by iron convention, to stroll about in the bright sunshine, greeting your friends, imbibing iced drinks, and letting your eye stray down to the lower level of the island with its farmhouses embowered in vineyards; or across the glittering water towards the distant coastline and its volcano; or upwards, into those pinnacles of the higher region against whose

craggy ramparts, nearly always, a fleet of snowy sirocco-clouds was anchored. For Nepenthe was famous not only for its girls and lobsters, but also for its south wind.

As usual at this hour the market-place was crowded with folks. It was a gay throng. Priests and curly-haired children, farmers, fishermen, citizens, a municipal policeman or two, brightly dressed women of all ages, foreigners in abundance—they moved up and down, talking, laughing, gesticulating. Nobody had anything particular to do: such was the rule.

The Russian sect was well represented. They were religious enthusiasts, ever increasing in numbers and led by their Master, the divinely inspired Bazhakuloff, who was then living in almost complete seclusion on the island. They called themselves the "Little White Cows," to mark their innocence of worldly affairs; and their scarlet blouses, fair hair, and wondering blue eyes were quite a feature of the place. Overhead, fluttering flags and wreaths of flowers, and bunting, and brightly tinted paper festoons—an orgy of colour, in honour of the saint's festival on the morrow.

The Duchess, attired in black, with a black and white sunshade, and a string of preposterous amethysts nestling in the imitation Val of her bosom, was leaning on the arm of an absurdly good-looking youth whom she addressed as Denis. Everyone called him Denis or Mr. Denis. People used his surname as little as possible. It was Phipps.

With a smile for everyone, she moved more deliberately than the rest, and used her fan rather more frequently. She knew that the sirocco was making stealthy inroads upon her carefully powdered cheeks; she wanted to look her best on the arrival of Don Francesco who was to bring some important message from the clerical authorities of the mainland anent her forthcoming reception into the Roman Catholic Church. He was her friend. Soon he would be her confessor.

Worldly-wise, indolent, good-natured and, like most southerners, a thorough-going pagan, Don Francesco was deservedly popular as ecclesiastic. Women adored him; he adored women. He passed for an unrivalled preacher; his golden eloquence made converts everywhere, greatly to the annoyance of the parroco, the parish priest, who was doubtless sounder on the Trinity but a shocking bad orator and altogether deficient in humanity, and who nearly had a fit, they said, when the other was created Monsignor. Don Francesco was a fisher of men, and of women. He fished *ad maiorem Dei gloriam,* and for the fun of the thing. It was his way of taking exercise, he once confessed to his friend Keith; he was too fat to run about like other people—he could only talk. He fished among natives, and among foreigners.

Foreigners were hard to catch, on Nepenthe. They came and went in such breathless succession. Of the permanent residents only the Duchess, always of High Church leanings, had of late yielded to

his blandishments. She was fairly hooked. Madame Steynlin, a lady of Dutch extraction whose hats were proverbial, was uncompromisingly Lutheran. The men were past redemption, all save the Commissioner who, however, was under bad influences and an incurable wobbler, anyhow. Eames, the scholar, cared for nothing but his books. Keith, a rich eccentric who owned one of the finest villas and gardens on the place, only came to the island for a few weeks every year. He knew too much, and had travelled too far, to be anything but a hopeless unbeliever; besides, he was a particular friend of his, with whom he agreed, in his heart of hearts, on every subject. The frequenters of the Club were mostly drunkards, derelicts, crooks, or faddists—not worth catching.

Carriages began to arrive on the scene. That of Don Francesco drove up first of all. He stepped out and sailed across the piazza like a schooner before the wind. But his discourse, usually ample and florid as befitted both his person and his calling, was couched on this occasion in Tacitean brevity.

"We have landed a queer fish, Duchess," he remarked. "He calls himself Bishop of Bim-Bam-Bum, and resembles a brokendown matrimonial agent. So lean! So yellow! His face all furrowed! He has lived very viciously, that man. Perhaps he is mad. In every case, look to your purse, Mr. Denis. He'll be here in a minute."

"That's quite right," said the young man. "The Bishop of Bampopo. It's in the *New York Herald*.

Sailing by the *Mozambique*. But they didn't say he was coming to the island. I wonder what he wants here?"

Don Francesco was aghast.

"Indeed?" he asked. "A bishop, and so yellow! He must have thought me very rude," he added.

"You couldn't be rude if you tried," said the Duchess, giving him a playful slap with her fan.

She was burning with ardour to be the first to introduce such a lion to the local society. But fearful of making a *faux pas*, she said:

"You'll go and speak to him, Denis. Find out if it's the right one—the one you read about in the paper, I mean. Then come and tell me."

"Good Lord, Duchess, don't ask me to do that! I couldn't tackle a bishop. Not an African. Not unless he has a proper apron on."

"Be a man, Denis. He won't bite a pretty boy like you."

"What nice things the lady is saying to you," observed Don Francesco.

"She always does," he laughed, "when she wants me to do something for her. I haven't been on this island long, but I have already found out the Duchess! You do it, Don Francesco. He is sure to be the right one. They get yellow, out there. Sometimes green."

Mr. Heard was intercepted on his way to the hotel by the genial priest, and formally presented to the Duchess. She was more than condescending to this stern and rather tired-looking man; she was

gracious. She made all kinds of polite enquiries, and indicated the various sites and persons of interest; while Don Francesco, he observed, had unaccountably recovered from his sudden attack of bad humour on the steamer.

"And that is where I live," she said, pointing to a large and severe structure whose walls had plainly not been whitewashed for many long years. "It's an old disused convent, built by the Good Duke Alfred. Wasn't it, Denis?"

"I really couldn't say, Duchess. I never heard of the gentleman."

"That Good Duke was an unmitigated ruffian," observed Don Francesco.

"Oh, don't say that! Think of all the good he did for the island. Think of that frieze in the church! I have acres and acres of rooms to walk about in," she continued, addressing the bishop. "All by myself! I'm quite a hermit, you know. You will perhaps be able to have a cup of tea with me today?"

"Not exactly a hermit," Denis interposed.

"To take tea with the Duchess is an experience, a revelation," said Don Francesco in judicial tones. "I have enjoyed that meal in various parts of the world, but nobody can manage it like she can. She has the true gift. You will make tea for us in Paradise, dear lady. As to luncheon, let me tell you in confidence, Mr. Heard, that my friend Keith, whom you will meet sooner or later, has a most remarkable chef. What that man of Keith's can-

not cook is not worth eating."

"How delightful!" replied the bishop, slightly embarrassed. "And where," he added, laughing—"where does one dine?"

"I do not dine. Madame Steynlin used to give nice evening parties," he continued reflectively, and with a shade of sadness in his voice. "Excellent little dinners! But she is so taken up with Russians just now; they quite monopolise her house. Down there; do you see, Mr. Heard? That white villa by the sea, at the end of the promontory? She is so romantic. That is why she bought a house which nobody else would have bought at any price. That little place, all by itself—it fascinated her. Bitterly she regrets her choice. She has discovered the drawbacks of a promontory. My dear Duchess, never live on a promontory! It has fearful inconveniences; you are overlooked by everybody. All the island knows what you do, and who visits you, and when, and why. . . . Yes, I remember those dinners with regret. Nowadays I must content myself with a miserable supper at home. The doctor has forbidden dinners. He says I am getting too fat."

Denis remarked:

"Your fat is your fortune, Don Francesco."

"My fortune, then, is a heavy load to bear. Mr. Keith tells me I have seven double chins, three behind and four in front. He says he has counted them carefully. He declares that an eighth is in course of formation. It is too much for a person of my austere temperament."

"You need never believe a word Keith says," said the Duchess. "He upsets me with his long words and his—his awful views. He really does."

"I tell him he is the Antichrist," observed Don Francesco, gravely shaking his head. "But we shall see! We shall catch him yet."

The Duchess had no idea what the Antichrist was, but she felt sure it was something not quite nice.

"If I thought he was anything like that, I would never ask him to my house again. The Antichrist! Ah, talk of angels——"

The person in question suddenly appeared, superintending half a dozen young gardeners who carried various consignments of plants wrapped up in straw which had arrived, presumably, by the steamer.

Mr. Keith was older than he looked—incredibly old, in fact, though nobody could bring himself to believe it; he was well preserved by means of a complicated system of life, the details of which, he used to declare, were not fit for publication. That was only his way of talking. He exaggerated so dreadfully. His face was clean-shaven, rosy, and of cherubic fulness; his eyes beamed owlishly through spectacles which nobody had ever seen him take off. But for those spectacles he might have passed for a well-groomed baby in a soap-advertisement. He was supposed to sleep in them.

It looked as if Mr. Keith had taken an instantaneous liking to the bishop.

"Bampopo? Why, of course. I've been there.

Years and years ago. Long before your time, I'm afraid. How is the place getting on? Better roads, no doubt. And better food, I hope! I was much interested in that little lake—you know? It seemed to have no outlet. We must talk it over. And I liked those Bulanga people—fine fellows! You liked them too? I'm glad to hear it. Such a lot of nonsense was talked about their depravity! If you have nothing better to do, come and lunch to-morrow, can you? Villa Khismet. Anybody will show you the way. You, Denis," he added, "you disappoint me. You look like a boy who is fond of flowers. And yet you have never been to see my cannas, which are the finest in the kingdom, to say nothing of myself, who am also something of a flower. A carnivorous orchid, I fancy."

"A virgin lily," suggested Don Francesco.

"I wish I could manage to come," replied Mr. Heard. "But I must look for a cousin of mine to-morrow. Mrs. Meadows. Perhaps you know her?"

The priest said:

"We all know Mrs. Meadows. And we all like her. Unfortunately she lives far, far away; right up there," and he pointed vaguely towards the sirocco clouds. "In the Old Town, I mean. She dwells like a hermit, all alone. You can drive up there in a carriage, of course. It is a pity all these nice people live so far away. There is Count Caloveglia, for instance, whom I would like to see every day of my life. He talks better English than I do, the old humbug! He, too, is a hermit. But he will be down

here to-morrow. He never misses the theatricals."

Everybody seems to be a hermit hereabouts, thought Mr. Heard. And yet this place is seething with people!

Aloud he said:

"So my cousin lives up in the fog. And does it always hang about like this?"

"Oh dear no!" replied the Duchess. "It goes away, sometimes, in the afternoon. The sirocco, this year, has been most exceptional. Most exceptional! Don't you think so, Denis?"

"Really couldn't say, Duchess. You know I only arrived last week."

"Most exceptional! Don Francesco will bear me out."

"It blows," said the priest, "when the good God wishes it to blow. He has been wishing pretty frequently of late."

"I am writing to your cousin," the Duchess remarked, "to ask her to my small annual gathering after the festival of Saint Dodekanus. To-morrow, you know. Quite an informal little affair. I may count on you, Bishop? You'll all come, won't you? You too, Mr. Keith. But no long words, remember! Nothing about reflexes and præternatural and things like that. And not a syllable about the Incarnation, please. It scares me. What's the name of her villa, Denis?"

"Mon Repos. Rather a commonplace name, I think—Mon Repos."

"It is," said Keith. "But there is nothing common-

place about the lady. She is what I would call a New Woman."

"Dear me!"

Mr. Heard was alarmed at this picture of his cousin. He did not altogether approve of New Women.

"She has long ago passed the stage you have in mind, Bishop. She is newer than that. The real novelty! Looks after the baby, and thinks of her husband in India. I believe I have many points in common with the New Woman. I often think of people in India."

"Such a dear little child," said the Duchess.

"Almost as round as myself," added Don Francesco. "There goes the Commissioner! He is fussing about with the judge, that red-haired man—do you see, Mr. Heard?—who limps like Mephistopheles and spits continually. They say he wants to imprison all the Russians. Poor folks! They ought to be sent home; they don't belong here. He is looking at us now. Ha, the animal! He has the Evil Eye. He is also scrofulous, rachitic. And his name is Malipizzo."

"What a funny name," remarked the bishop.

"Yes, and he is a funny animal. They are great friends, those two."

"A horrible man, that judge," said the Duchess. "Only think, Mr. Heard, an atheist."

"A freemason," corrected Mr. Keith.

"It's the same thing. And ugly! Nobody has a right to be quite so ugly. I declare he's worse than the cinematograph villain—you remember, Denis?"

"It is a miracle that he has lived so long, with that face," added Don Francesco. "I think God created him in order that mankind should have some idea of the meaning of the word 'grotesque.' "

The proud title "Commissioner" caused the bishop to pay particular attention to the other of the two individuals in question. He beheld a stumpy and pompous-looking personage, flushed in the face, with a moth-eaten grey beard and shifty grey eyes, clothed in a flannel shirt, tweed knickerbockers, brown stockings, white spats and shoes. Such was the Commissioner's invariable get-up, save that in winter he wore a cap instead of a panama. He was smoking a briar pipe and looking blatantly British, as if he had just spent an unwashed night in a third-class carriage between King's Cross and Aberdeen. The magistrate on the other hand—the red-haired man—was jauntily dressed, with a straw hat on one side of his repulsive head, and plenty of starch about him.

"I never knew we had a Commissioner here," said Mr. Heard.

Keith replied:

"We haven't. He is Financial Commissioner for Nicaragua. An incomparable ass is Mr. Freddy Parker."

"Oh, he has a sensible idea now and then, when he forgets to be a fool," observed Don Francesco. "He is President of the Club, Mr. Heard. They will elect you honorary member. Take my advice. Avoid the whisky."

JOHN AVETEN

Denis remarked, after a critical glance in the same direction.

"I notice that the Commissioner looks redder in the face than when I last saw him."

"That," said Keith, "is one of Mr. Parker's characteristics."

Chapter III

Concerning the life and martyrdom of Saint Dodekanus, patron of Nepenthe, we possess hardly any information of a trustworthy nature. It is with his career as with that of other saints: they become overlaid—encrusted, as it were—with extraneous legendary material in the course of ages, even as a downward-rolling avalanche gathers snow. The nucleus is hard to find. What is incontestably true may be summed up almost in one paragraph.

He was born in A. D. 450, or thereabouts, in the city of Kallisto in Crete. He was an only child, a beautiful but unruly boy, the despair of his widowed mother. At the age of thirteen he encountered, one evening, an elderly man of thoughtful mien, who addressed him in familiar language. On several later occasions he discoursed with the same personage, in a grove of laurels and pines known as Alephane; but what passed between them, and whether it was some divine apparition, or

merely a man of flesh and blood, was never discovered, for he seems to have kept his mother in ignorance of the whole affair. From that time onward his conduct changed. He grew pensive, mild, and charitable. He entered, as youthful acolyte, a neighbouring Convent of Salacian monks, and quickly distinguished himself for piety and the gift of miracles. In the short space of three years, or thereabouts, he had healed eight lepers, caused the clouds to rain, walked dryshod over several rivers, and raised twenty-three persons from the dead.

At the age of eighteen he had a second vision. This time it was a young woman, of pleasing exterior. He discoursed with her, on several occasions, in the grove of laurels and pines known as Alephane; but what passed between them, and whether it was a woman of flesh and blood, or merely an angel, was never discovered, for he seems to have kept his brother monks in ignorance of the whole affair. From that time onward his conduct changed. He grew restless and desirous of converting the heathen. He set sail for Lybia, suffered shipwreck in the Greater Syrtis, and narrowly escaped with his life. Thence he passed onward, preaching to black nations as he moved along, and converting tribes innumerable. For three-and-thirty years he wandered till, one evening, he saw the moon rise on the right side of his face.

He had entered the land of the Crotalophoboi, cannibals and necromancers who dwelt in a region so hot, and with light so dazzling, that their eyes

grew on the soles of their feet. Here he laboured for eighty years, redeeming them to Christianity from their magical and bloodthirsty practices. In recompense whereof they captured him at the patriarchal age of 132, or thereabouts, and bound him with ropes between two flat boards of palmwood. Thus they kept the prisoner, feeding him abundantly, until that old equinoctial feast drew near. On the evening of that day they sawed the whole, superstitiously, into twelve separate pieces, one for each month of the year; and devoured of the saint what was to their liking.

During this horrid banquet a femur or thighbone was accidently cast upon a millstone which lay by the shore, having been borrowed by the Crotalophoboi from the neighbouring tribe of Garimanes a good many years previously and never returned to them by reason, they declared, of its excessive weight. There it remained till, one day, during a potent sirocco tempest, the stone was uplifted by the force of the waters, and miraculously wafted over the sea to Nepenthe. Forthwith a chapel was built on the spot, to commemorate the event and preserve the sacred relic which soon began working wonders for the good of the island, such as warding off Saracenic invasions, procuring plentiful vintages, and causing sterile cattle to produce offspring.

In later years the main church was dedicated to Saint Dodekanus and the relic moved thither and enclosed within that silver statue of the saint which

is carried abroad in procession at his annual festival, or on any particular occasion when his help is to be invoked. And all through succeeding ages the cult of the saint waxed in pomp and splendour. Nobody, probably, has done more to foster pious feelings towards their island-patron than the Good Duke Alfred who, among other things, caused a stately frieze to be placed in the church, picturing in twelve marble tablets the twelve chief episodes in the life of the Saint—one for each month of the year. This frieze indeed was admired so unreservedly, so recklessly, that the Good Duke felt it his duty to remove the sculptor's eyes and (on second thoughts) his hands as well, in order that no other sovereign should possess works by so consummate a master of stonecraft. There the disciplinary measures ended. He did his best to console the gifted artist who was fed, henceforward, on lobsters, decorated with the order of the Golden Vine, and would doubtless have been ennobled after death, had the Prince not predeceased the sculptor.

Such, briefly, is the history of Saint Dodekanus, and the origin of his cult on Nepenthe.

Legends galore, often contradictory to this account and to one another, have clustered round his name, as was inevitable. He is supposed to have preached in Asia Minor; to have died as a young man, in his convent; to have become a hermit, a cobbler, a bishop (of Nicomedia), a eunuch, a politician. Two volumes of mediocre sermons in the Byzantine tongue have been ascribed to him. These and other

crudities may be dismissed as apocryphal. Even his name has given rise to controversy, although its origin from the Greek word *dodeka,* signifying twelve and alluding to the twelve morsels into which his body was superstitiously divided, is as self-evident as well can be. Thus a worthy young canon of the church of Nepenthe, Giacinto Mellino, who has lately written a life of Saint Eulalia, the local patroness of sailors—her festival occurs twelve days after that of Saint Dodekanus—takes occasion, in this otherwise commendable pamphlet, to scoff at the old-established derivation of the name and to propose an alternative etymology. He lays it down that the then pagan inhabitants of the island, desirous of sharing in the benefits of Christianity which had already reached the mainland but left untouched their lonely rock, sent a missive to the bishop containing the two words *Do dekanus:* give us a deacon! The grammar is at fault, he explains, because of their rudimentary knowledge of the Latin tongue; they had only learnt, hitherto, the first person singular and the nominative case—so he says; and then proceeds to demonstrate, with unanswerable arguments, that Greek was the spoken language of Nepenthe at this period. Several scholars have been swayed by his specious logic to abandon the older and sounder interpretation. There are yet other conjectures anent the word Dodekanus, all more or less fanciful. . . .

If the Crotalophoboi had not devoured the missionary Dodekanus, we should assuredly never

have heard of Monsignor Perrelli, the learned and genial historian of Nepenthe. It was that story, he expressly tells us, which inflamed him, a mere visitor to the place, with a desire to know more about the island. A people like the Nepentheans, who could cherish in their hearts a tale of such beauty, must be worthy, he concluded, "of the closest and most sympathetic scrutiny." Thus, one thing leading to another, as always happens where local researches are concerned, he soon found himself collecting other legends, traditions, historical data, statistics of agriculture and natural productions, and so forth. The result of these labours was embodied in the renowned *Antiquities of Nepenthe.*

This book, a model of its kind, is written in Latin. It seems to have been the author's only work, and has gone through several editions; the last one—by no means the best as regards typography —being that of 1709. The Crotalophoboi therefore, who procured the sanctification of Dodekanus by methods hardly commendable to decent folks, can be said to have done some good in the world, if the creation of a literary masterpiece like these *Antiquities,* for which they are indirectly responsible, may be classed under that head.

It is a pity we know so little of the life of this Monsignor Perrelli. He is disappointingly reticent about himself. We learn that he was a native of the mainland; that he came here, as a youth, afflicted with rheumatic troubles; that these troubles were

relieved by an application of those health-giving waters which he lived to describe in one of the happiest sections of his work, and which were to become famous to the world at large through certain classical experiments carried out under his contemporary, the Good Duke Alfred—a potentate who, by the way, does not seem to have behaved very prettily to our scholar. And that is absolutely all we know about him. The most painstaking enquiries on the part of Mr. Eames have failed to add a single item of positive information to our knowledge of the historian of Nepenthe. We cannot tell when, or where, he died. He seems to have ended in regarding himself as a native of the place. The wealth of material incorporated in the book leads to the supposition that he must have spent long years on the island. We may further presume, from his title, that he belonged to the church; it was the surest path of advancement for a young man of quality in those days.

A perfunctory glance into his pages will suffice to prove that he lacked what is called the ecclesiastical bent of mind. Reading between the lines, one soon discovers that he is not so much a priest as a statesman and philosopher, a student curious in the lore of mankind and of nature—alert, sagacious, discriminating. He tells us, for example, that this legend of the visions and martyrdom of Saint Dodekanus, which he was the first to disentangle from its heterogeneous accretions, was vastly to his liking. Why? Because of its churchly flavour?

Not so; but because he detected therein "truth and symbol. It is a tale of universal applicability; the type, as it were, of every great man's life, endeavour, and reward." The introduction to these *Antiquities,* setting forth his maxims for the writing of history, might have been composed not three centuries ago, but yesterday—or even to-morrow; so modern is its note.

Hearken to these weighty words:

> Portraiture of characters and events should take the form of one gentleman conversing with another, in the easy tone of good society. The author who sets out to address a crowd defeats his own object; he eliminates the essence of good writing —frankness. You cannot be frank with men of low condition. You must presuppose a refined and congenial listener, a man or woman whom you would not hesitate to take by the hand and lead into the circle of your own personal friends. If this applies to literature of every kind, it applies to history in a peculiar degree.
>
> History deals with situations and figures not imaginary but real. It demands therefore a combination of qualities unnecessary to the poet or writer of romance—glacial judgment coupled with fervent sympathy. The poet may be an inspired illiterate, the romance-writer an uninspired hack. Under no circumstances can either of them be accused of wronging or deceiving the public, however incongruous their efforts. They write well or badly, and there the matter ends. The historian, who fails in his duty, deceives the reader and wrongs the dead. A man weighted with such responsibilities is deserving of an audience more than usually select—an audience of his equals, men of the world. No vulgarian can be admitted to share those confidences. . . .
>
> The Greeks figured forth a Muse of History; they dared express their opinions. Genesis, that ancient barrier, did not exist for them. It stands in the way of the modern historian; it involves him in a ceaseless conflict with his own honesty. If he values his skin, he must accommodate himself to current dogmas and refrain from truthful comments and conclusions.

He has the choice of being a chronologer or a ballad monger —obsolete and unimportant occupations. Unenviable fate of those who aspire to be teachers of mankind, that they themselves should be studied with a kind of antiquarian interest, stimulating thought not otherwise than as warning example! Clio has fallen from her pedestal. That radiant creature, in identifying her interests with those of theocracy, has become the hand-maiden of a withered and petulant mistress, a mercenary slut. So things will remain, till mankind has acquired a fresh body of ethics, corresponding to modern needs. It is useless, it is dangerous, to pour new wine into old bottles. . . .

He carries out his theory. The work of Monsignor Perrelli is, above all things, a human document—the revelation of a personality cultured and free from prejudice. Indeed, when one considers the religious situation of those days, he seems to be sailing perilously near the wind in some of his theological reflections; so much so, that Mr. Eames often wondered whether this might not account for our ignorance of his later life and the manner of his death. He held it possible that the scholar may have fallen into the clutches of the Inquisition, never again to return to the surface of society. It would explain why the first edition of the *Antiquities* is so extremely rare, and why the two subsequent ones were issued, respectively, at Amsterdam and Bâle.

Incidentally, the book contains in its nine hundred pages all that could possibly interest a contemporary student about the history and natural products of Nepenthe. It is still a mine of antiquarian information, though large sections of the work have inevitably become obsolete. To bring

the *Antiquities* up to date by means of a revised and enlarged version enriched with footnotes, appendixes, and copious illustrations, was the ambition, the sole ambition, of Mr. Ernest Eames, B.A. . .

It was not true to say of this gentleman that he fled from England to Nepenthe because he forged his mother's will, because he was arrested while picking the pockets of a lady at Tottenham Court Road Station, because he refused to pay for the upkeep of his seven illegitimate children, because he was involved in a flamboyant scandal of unmentionable nature and unprecedented dimensions, because he was detected while trying to poison the rhinoceros at the Zoo with an arsenical bun, because he strangled his mistress, because he addressed an almost disrespectful letter to the Primate of England beginning "My good Owl"—or for any suchlike reason; and that he now remained on the island only because nobody was fool enough to lend him the ten pounds requisite for a ticket back again.

He came there originally to save money; and he stayed there originally because, if he had happened to die on his homeward journey, there would not have been enough coppers in his pocket to pay for the funeral expenses. Nowadays, having solved the problem of how to live on £85 a year, he stayed for another reason as well: to annotate Perrelli's *Antiquities*. It sweetened his self-imposed exile.

He was a dry creature, almost wizened, with bright eyes and a short moustache; unostentatiously dressed; fastidious, reserved, genteel, precise in

manner, and living a retired life in a two-roomed cottage somewhere among the vineyards.

He had taken a high degree in classics, though Greek was never much to his taste. It was "run-away stuff"; nervous and sensuous; it opened up too many vistas, philological and social, for his positive mind to assimilate with comfort. Those particles alone—there was something ambiguous, something almost disreputable, in their jocund pliability, their readiness to lend themselves to improper uses. But Latin—ah, Latin was different! Even at his preparatory school, where he was known as a swot of the first water, he had displayed an unhealthy infatuation for that tongue; he loved its cold, lapidary construction; and while other boys played football or cricket, this withered little fellow used to lark about with a note-book, all by himself, torturing sensible English into its refractory and colourless periods and elaborating, without the help of a Gradus, those inept word-mosaics which are called Latin verses. "Good fun," he used to say, "and every bit as exciting as algebra," as though that constituted a recommendation. Often the good form master shook his head and enquired anxiously whether he was feeling unwell, or had secret troubles of any kind.

"Oh no, sir," he would then reply, with a funny little laugh. "Thank you, sir. But please, sir! Would you mind telling me whether *pecunia* really comes from *pecus*. Because Adams minor (another swot) says it doesn't."

Later on, at the University, he used the English language for the sake of convenience—in order to make himself understood by Dons and Heads of Colleges. His thoughts, his dreams, were in Latin.

Such a man, arriving almost penniless on Nepenthe, might have passed a torpid month or two, then drifted into the Club-set and gone to the dogs altogether. Latin saved him. He took to studying those earlier local writers who often composed in that tongue. The Jesuitical smoothness, the saccharine felicity of authors like Giannettasio had just begun to pall on his fancy, when the *Antiquities* fell into his hands. It was like a draught of some generous southern wine, after a course of barley-water. Here was Latin worth reading; rich, sinewy, idiomatic, full of flavour, masculine. Flexible, yet terse. Latin after his own heart: a cry across the centuries!

So bewitched was Mr. Eames with the grammar and syntax of the *Antiquities* that he had already gone through the book three times ere realizing that this man, who could construct such flowing, glowing sentences, was actually writing about something. Yes, he had something of uncommon interest to impart. And a gentleman, by Jove! So different from what one runs up against nowadays. He had an original way of looking at things—a human way. Very human. Those quaint streaks of credulity, those whimsical blasphemies, those spicy Court anecdotes dropped, as it were, in the smoking room of a patrician club—a rare old fellow! He would

have given anything to have made his acquaintance.

Forthwith a change came over Mr. Ernest Eames. His frozen classical mind blossomed under the sunny stimulus of the Renaissance scholar. He entered upon a second boyhood—a real boyhood, this time, full of enthusiasms and adventures into flowery by-paths of learning. Monsignor Perrelli absorbed him. He absorbed Monsignor Perrelli. Marginal observations led to footnotes; footnotes to appendixes. He had found an interest in life. He would annotate the *Antiquities*.

In the section which deals with the life of Saint Dodekanus the Italian had displayed more than his usual erudition and acumen. He had sifted the records with such incredible diligence that little was left for the pen of an annotator, save words of praise. In two small matters, however, the Englishman, considerably to his regret, was enabled or rather obliged to add a postscript.

Many a time he cursed the day when his researches among the archives of the mainland brought him into contact with the unpublished chronicle of Father Capocchio, a Dominican friar of licorous and even licentious disposition, a hater of Nepenthe and a personal enemy, it seemed, of his idol Perrelli. His manuscript—the greater part of it, at all events—was not fit to be printed; not fit to be touched by respectable people. Mr. Eames felt it his duty to waive considerations of delicacy. In his capacity of annotator he would have plunged headlong into the Augean stables, had there been any likelihood

of extracting therefrom the germs of a luminous footnote. He perused the manuscript, making notes as he went along. This wretched monk, he concluded, must have possessed a damnably intimate knowledge of Nepenthean conditions, and a cantankerous and crapulous turn of mind, into the bargain. He never lost an opportunity of denigrating the island; he was determined, absolutely determined, to see only the bad side of things, so far as that place was concerned.

Regarding the pious relic, for instance,—the thigh-bone of the saint, preserved in the principal church—he wrote:

"A certain Perrelli who calls himself historian, which is as though one should call a mule a horse, or an ass a mule, brays loudly and disconnectedly about the femur of the local god. We have personally examined this priceless femur. It is not a femur, but a tibia. And it is the tibia not of a saint, but of a young cow or calf. We may mention, in passing, that we hold a diploma in anatomy from the Palermitan Faculty of Medicine."

That was Father Capocchio's way: bald to coarseness, whenever he lacked occasion to be obscene.

To Mr. Eames it would have mattered little, *a priori,* whether the relic was a femur or a tibia, of cow or man. In this case, he liked to think it was the thigh-bone of a saint. He possessed an unusually strong dose of that Latin *pietas,* that reverence which consists in leaving things as they are, particularly when they have been described for the

benefit of posterity, with the most engaging candour, by a man of Perrelli's calibre. Now an insinuation like this could not be slurred over. It was a downright challenge! The matter must be thrashed out. For four months he pored over books on surgery and anatomy. Then, having acquired a knowledge of the subject—adequate, though necessarily superficial—he applied to the ecclesiastical authorities for permission to view the relic. It was politely refused. The saintly object, they declared, could only be exhibited to persons professing the Roman Catholic Faith, and armed with a special recommendation from the Bishop.

"These," he used to say, "are the troubles which lie in wait for a conscientious annotator."

On another point, that of a derivation of the saint's name, he was pained to discover in the pages of Father Capocchio an alternative suggestion, of which more anon. It caused him many sleepless nights. But on matters pertaining to the climate of Nepenthe, its inhabitants, products, minerals, water-supply, fisheries, trade, folk-lore, ethnology, —on questions such as these he had gathered much fresh information. Sheaves of stimulating footnotes had accumulated on his desk.

When would all this material be published?

Mr. Eames had not the faintest idea. Meanwhile he calmly went on collecting and collecting, and collecting. Something might turn up, one of these days. Everybody with the slightest pretensions to scholarship was interested in his work; many friends

had made him offers of pecuniary assistance towards the printing of a book which could not be expected to be a source of profit to its publisher; the wealthy and good-natured Mr. Keith, in particular, used to complain savagely and very sincerely at not being allowed to assist to the extent of a hundred or two. There were days on which he seemed to yield to these arguments; days when he expanded and gave rein to his fancy, smiling in anticipation of that noble volume—the golden Latinity of Monsignor Perrelli enriched with twenty-five years' patient labour on the part of himself; days when he would go so far as to discuss prospective contracts, and bindings and photogravures, and margins, and paper. Everything, of course, was to be of appropriate quality—not pretentious, but distinguished. Oh, yes! A book of that kind—it must have a cachet of its own. . . .

Then, suddenly, he would observe that he was joking; only joking.

The true Mr. Eames revealed and reasserted himself. He shrank from the idea. He closed up like a flower in the chill of night-fall. He was not going to put himself under obligations to anybody. He would keep his sense of personal independence, even if it entailed the sacrifice of a life's ambition. Owe no man anything! The words rang in his ears. They were his father's words. Owe no man anything! They were that gentleman's definition of a gentleman—a definition which was cordially approved by every other gentleman who, like Mr.

Eames junior, happened to hold analogous views.

Gentlemen being rather scarce nowadays, we cannot but feel grateful to the Crotalophoboi for devouring Saint Dodekanus and paving the way, *via* the *Antiquities* of Monsignor Perrelli, for the refined personality of Mr. Eames—even if such was not their original intention.

Chapter IV

Next morning, at precisely 4 A. M., there was an earthquake. Foreigners unaccustomed to Nepenthean conditions rushed in their pyjamas out of doors, to escape the falling wreckage. An American lady, staying at Mr. Muhlen's high-class hotel, jumped from her bed-room on the third floor into the courtyard below, and narrowly escaped bruising her ankle.

It was a false alarm. The sudden clanging of every bell on the place, the explosion of twelve hundred mortars and the simultaneous booming of an enormous cannon—that far-famed gun whose wayward tricks had cost the lives of hundreds of its loaders in the days of the Good Duke—might have passed for an earthquake of the first magnitude, so far as noise and concussion were concerned. The island rocked to its foundations. It was the signal for the festival of the patron saint to begin.

Nobody could have slept through that din. Mr.

Heard, dog-tired as he was, woke up and opened his eyes.

"Things are happening here," he said—a remark which he found himself repeating on several later occasions.

He looked round the room. It was not an hotel bedroom. Then he began to remember things, drowsily. He remembered the pleasant surprise of the previous evening—how the Duchess had called to mind a small villa, vacated earlier than she had expected by a lady friend for whom she had taken it. It was furnished, spotlessly clean, with a woman, a capable cook, in attendance. She had insisted on his living there.

"So much nicer than a dreadful room in an hotel! You'll show the bishop all over it, won't you, Denis?"

Walking together, he and Denis, they had been overtaken by another recent visitor to Nepenthe. It was Mr. Edgar Marten. Mr. Marten was a hirsute and impecunious young Hebrew of low tastes, with a passion for mineralogy. He had profited by some University grant to make certain studies at Nepenthe which was renowned for its variegated rocks. There was something striking about him, thought Mr. Heard. He said little of consequence, but Denis listened enthusiastically to his abstruse remarks about fractures and so forth, and watched with eagerness as he poked his stick into the rough walls to dislodge some stone that seemed to be of interest.

"So you don't know the difference between augite and hornblende?" he once enquired. "Really? Dash my eyes! How old did you say you were?"

"Nineteen."

"And what have you been doing, Phipps, these last nineteen years?"

"One can't know everything at my age."

"Granted. But I think you might have learnt that much. Come to me on Thursday morning. I'll see what I can do for you."

Mr. Heard rather admired this youthful scientist. The fellow knew what he was after; he was after stones. Perfect of his kind—a condition which always appealed to the bishop. Pleasant youngsters, both of them. And so different from each other!

As to Denis—he could not make up his mind about Denis. To begin with, he exhaled that peculiar College aroma which the most heroic efforts of a lifetime often fail to dissipate. Then, he had said something about Florence, and Cinque-Cento, and Jacopo Bellini. The bishop, a practical man, had not much use for Jacopo Bellini or for people who talked about him. None the less, while making himself useful with unpacking and arranging things, Denis dropped a remark which struck Mr. Heard.

"The canvas of Nepenthe," he observed, "is rather overcharged."

Rather overcharged. . . .

It was true, thought the bishop, as he glanced out of his window that evening, all alone, over the sea into which a young moon was just sinking

to rest. Overcharged! A ceaseless ebb and flow of humanity surged before his weary eyes. That sense of irreality which had struck him on his first view of the island was still persisting; the south wind, no doubt, helped the illusion. He remembered the general affluence and kindliness of the people; that, at least, had made a definite mark upon his mind. He liked the place. Already he felt at home here, and in better health. But when he tried to conjure up some definite impression of town and people, the images became blurred; the smiling priest, the Duchess, Mr. Keith—they were like figures in a dream; they merged into memories of Africa, of his fellow-passengers from Zanzibar; they mingled with projects relating to his own future in England —projects relating to his cousin on Nepenthe. Mr. Heard felt exhausted.

He was too tired to be greatly affected by that cannonade, which was enough to rouse the dead. Something must be happening, he mused; then, his meditations concluded, turned on his other side. He slept well into the morning, and found his breakfast appetisingly laid out in the adjoining room.

And now, he thought, for that procession.

Bells were ringing gaily into the sunshine. From a long way off, he discerned the brazen tones of a band, the chanting of priests and townspeople, shrill voices of women. The pageant came in sight—winding its way through the multitudes under the beflagged arches of greenery, while a rain of flowers descended from windows and balconies overhead.

Clusters of children went before, in many-tinted array, according to their various schools or confraternities. Then came the municipal band in uniform, playing the cheeriest of tunes, and escorted by the Nepenthe militia whose old-fashioned costume of silver and scarlet was most effective. The authorities of the island trod on their heels—grave gentlemen in black clothes, some of them adorned with ribbons and decorations. The Mephistophelean judge, the freethinker, was among them; he limped along, expectorating every ten yards or so, presumably to mark his displeasure at being obliged, as official, to attend a religious function. The Commissioner, too, was in the ranks. He appeared just the same as yesterday; very informal in his knickerbockers and decidedly pink about the gills.

There followed a long train of priests, clad in lace and silken garments of every hue. They looked like a perambulating flower-garden. Plump, jovial fellows—chanting blithely, and occasionally exchanging a few words with one another. Don Francesco glittered in crimson vestments; he recognized Mr. Heard, and gave him a broad smile combined with something which might have been mistaken for a wink. The huge silver statue of the saint came next. It was a grotesque monster, borne aloft on a wooden platform that wobbled on the shoulders of eight lusty perspiring carriers. As it passed, all the onlookers raised their hats; all save the Russians, the Little White Cows who, standing aside with wonderment written on their childlike

faces, were relieved from this necessity, since the wearing of hats had been forbidden by their leader, their self-styled Messiah, the divinely inspired Bazhakuloff; they were to go bareheaded summer and winter, "like the Christians of old." Some ardent believers went so far as to kneel on the stony ground. The Duchess, the Catholic-to-be, had assumed this reverent posture; she was on the other side of the street, surrounded by a number of ladies and gentlemen. Mr. Heard, reviewing the crowd, abandoned the idea of piercing that procession and exchanging a few words with her. He would see her in the afternoon.

Then the bishop—the dignitary whom Don Francesco had called "not exactly a liberal." He tallied with that description. A wicked old face! He was blear-eyed, brown as a mummy, and so fat that his legs had long ago ceased to be any use save as a precarious support while standing. He rode, in gorgeous apparel, on a milk-white donkey which was led by two pretty choristers in blue. Attached to the end of a long pole, a green umbrella of Gargantuan proportions, adorned with red tassels, protected his wrinkled head from the rays of the sun. One hand clutched some religious object upon which his eyes were glued in a hypnotic trance, the other cruised aimlessly about the horizon, in the act of benediction.

Mumbo-jumbo, thought Mr. Heard.

Yet he looked without wincing at this caricature of Christianity. It was like an act in a pantomime.

He had seen funnier things in Africa. Among the Bitongos, for instance. They would have enjoyed this procession, the Bitongos. They were Christians; had taken to the Gospel like ducks to the water; wore top-hats at Easter. But liars—such dreadful liars! Just the reverse of the M'tezo. Ah, those M'tezo! Incurable heathen. He had given them up long ago. Anyhow, they despised lying. They filed their teeth, ate their superfluous female relations, swopped wives every new moon, and never wore a stitch of clothes. A man who appeared among the M'tezo in a fig-leaf would find himself in the cooking-pot within five minutes.

How they attached themselves to his heart, those black fellows. Such healthy animals! This spectacle, he discovered, was rather like Africa—the same steamy heat, the same blaring noises, dazzling light, and glowing colours; the same spirit of unconquerable playfulness in grave concerns.

And the Bumbulis, the Kubangos, the Mugwambas! And the Bulanga—that tribe whom Mr. Keith seemed to know so well! Really, the Bulanga were the worst of the lot. Not fit to be talked about. And yet, somehow or other, one could not help liking them. . . .

"Good morning, Bishop!" said a voice at his side. It was Mr. Keith. He looked well-washed and chubby in his spotless white clothes. Accompanying him was a friend in grey flannels whom he presently introduced as Mr. Eames. "Hope you slept well," he went on. "And how do you like the

procession? You are doing quite the right thing in attending. Oh quite. That is why I am here, though I don't much fancy these ceremonies. One ought to conform to custom. Well, what are you thinking?"

"I was thinking of Africa, and the pain which the natives will endure for what they call their pleasures. I wonder how much those men are paid for carrying that statue? They perspire pretty freely."

"They are paid nothing. They pay, themselves, a heavy sum for the privilege."

"You surprise me!"

"They have remission of sins; they can be as naughty as ever they like for a twelvemonth afterwards. That is a consideration. I will tell you something else about that idol. It is five hundred years old——"

"Oh, come!" interposed Mr. Eames, in a tone of gentle remonstrance. "The saint was cast exactly eighty-two years ago; they used to have a wooden one before that time. Anybody can see from the workmanship——"

"Have it your way, Eames. Eighty-two years old, I was going to say, and not yet paid for. They want some rich foreigner to produce the money. They are counting on van Koppen, just now; an American millionaire, you know, who comes here every year and spends a good deal of money. But I know old Koppen. He is no fool. By the way, Eames, what do you think of this discovery of mine? Of course you have heard of the James-

Lange theory of the Emotions, namely, that bodily changes follow directly on the perception of the existing fact and that our feeling of these changes as they occur is the Emotion. They developed the theory independently, and got great credit for it. Well, I find—what nobody seems to have noticed—that they were anticipated by Professor Maudsley. I've got a note of it in my pocket. Here you are. *Psychology of Mind*, 1876, pages 472-4 *et seq.*; 372, 384, 386-7 *et passim*. What do you say?"

"Nothing. I am not interested in psychology. You know it perfectly well."

"Why not? Wouldn't you get more fun out of life, if you were?"

"I have Perrelli."

"Always your old Perrelli! That reminds me, Eames. I mean to talk to van Koppen as soon as he arrives about getting that book of yours published. He is good for any amount. Koppen is your man."

There was a mischievous twinkle in his eye, as he said this.

"Please don't," implored Mr. Eames. "You will annoy me very seriously."

"Don't be absurd, my dear fellow."

"You can't think how much you will annoy me! How often have I told you——"

"Then you must lunch with me to-day, together with the bishop. Don't trouble about driving to the Old Town to see your cousin," he added to Mr. Heard. "She is sure to be at the reception of the

Duchess this afternoon."

Mr. Eames said:

"So sorry. I must get back home. I only came out to speak to a man about a collar—for my dog, I mean. Another day, if you don't mind. And no millionaires, whatever you do!"

He departed, rather awkwardly.

"He is shy," Keith explained. "But he can tell you all about this island. And now come home with me, Bishop. I feel as if it were time for luncheon. It must be about half-past twelve."

Mr. Heard took out his watch.

"Half-past twelve to the minute," he said.

"I thought so. A man's best clock is his stomach. We have only a few hundred yards to go. Hot, isn't it? This infernal south wind. . . ."

The Villa Khismet was one of the surprises of Nepenthe. It lay somewhat out of the way, at the end of a narrow, gloomy and tortuous lane. Who would have dreamt of finding a house of this kind in such a situation? Who would have expected, on passing through that mouldy wooden gateway in the wall, to find himself in a courtyard that recalled the exquisite proportions and traceries of the Alhambra —to be able to wander thence under fretted arches through a maze of marble-paved Moorish chambers, great and small, opening upon each other at irregular angles with a deliciously impromptu effect? The palace had been built regardless of expense. It was originally laid out, Keith explained, by one of the old rulers of Nepenthe who, to tease his

faithful subjects, simulated a frenzied devotion for the poetry and architecture of the Saracens, their bitterest enemies.

Something Oriental still hung about these chambers, though the modern furniture was not at all in keeping with the style. Mr. Keith did not profess to be a man of taste. "I try to be comfortable," he used to say. He succeeded in being luxurious.

They glanced into the garden,—a spacious park-like enclosure terminating in a declivity, so as to afford a view over the sea far below. It was a mock wilderness of trees and bright blossoms, flooded in meridian sunlight. Some gardeners moved about, binding up the riotous vegetation that had sprouted overnight under the moist breath of the sirocco.

"It's too hot to think of lunching out here," said Keith. "You should come and see this place in the evening."

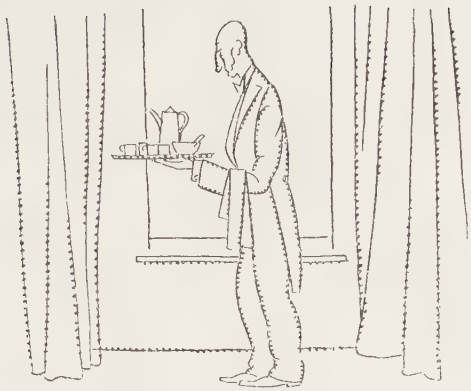
"It must be wonderful at that hour."

"Still more wonderful in the early morning, or by moonlight. But then I am generally alone. There are twenty-four fountains in this garden," he added. "They might help to keep the place cool. But of course not one of them is in use now. You have observed, have you not, that there is no running water on this island? That old Duke built the fountains all the same, and to every one of them he attached a cistern, to hold the winter rains; then a pumping apparatus. Relays of slaves had to work underground, day and night, pumping water for these twenty-four fountains; it fell back into the

cisterns, and was forced up again. The Arabs had fountains. He meant to have them too. Particularly at night! If anything went wrong with the machinery at that hour, there was the devil to pay. He swore he could not sleep unless he heard the music of the water. And his sleepless nights were bad for his subjects. They generally hid in caves till the fountains were reported to be in working order again. That is the way to run an island, Mr. Heard. One must be a stylist."

"You might re-activate one of them, at least, with the help of those servants."

"They have enough to do, I assure you, to re-activate me—keep me young and in good condition. To say nothing of the flowers, which also need a little friendly attention. . . ."



Chapter V

Mr. Heard enjoyed that luncheon. "The food, the wine, the service—they were faultless; something altogether out of the way," he declared with frank conviction.

"Then you must come again," replied his host. "How long did you say you were staying here?"

"Ten days or so. It depends upon Mrs. Meadows and her movements. I understand she is all alone up there, in the clouds. Her husband's leave has been postponed for the second time. He was going to pick her up on his way to England. She had to leave India before him, on account of the child."

"A pretty baby. Couldn't stand the climate, I suppose."

"Exactly. My mother asked me to look in and cheer her up a little, and perhaps take her back with me. And really," he added, "it's rather awkward! I have not seen my cousin since she was a little girl. What does she look like?"

"Tailor-made. Looks as if she rode well and knew her own mind. Looks as if she had been through a good deal of trouble."

"I daresay she has. She was always impetuous, even as a child. That first marriage was not at all a success. Some foreign scoundrel who deserted her and vanished. I was in China at the time, but my mother wrote me about it."

"A first marriage? She never told me about that."

"This second one was a love match. They ran away together. They must have had a hard time out there at first, living as they did. No doubt she has learnt to know her own mind; one has to cope with emergencies in a life like that. He has done well, I hear. A charming fellow, from all accounts, though I question whether they are properly married even now."

"Perhaps they can't be," replied Mr. Keith, "in view of the earlier affair. But how will they educate that boy, in India? It can't be done. India is no better than Bampopo, for such purposes. Did you do much educational work in Africa? I hope you were gentle with my friends the Bulanga?"

"We baptized two or three hundred of them one day. But they behaved shockingly the very next week—quite disgracefully! They are hopeless, those friends of yours, though one cannot help liking them somehow. I got through a good deal of other work of that kind," he added.

"I see you are a man of action. Sometimes I wish I were. A little money has made me lazy, I'm afraid.

But I do some thinking, and a fair lot of reading. I travel, I observe, I compare. Among other things I observe that our English system of education is all wrong. We ought to return to that old Camp-and-Court ideal."

"All wrong?" queried the bishop.

"Take a case like that young fellow Denis. What is a child of his age doing at a University? No. If I had a son—but I am boring you."

"I have not been bored since I was twenty."

"I wish I could say the same for myself. I grow more intolerant of fools as the years roll on. If I had a son, I was saying, I would take him from school at the age of fourteen, not a moment later, and put him for two years in a commercial house. Wake him up; make an English citizen of him. Teach him how to deal with men as men, to write a straightforward business letter, manage his own money and gain some respect for those industrial movements which control the world. Next, two years in some wilder part of the world, where his own countrymen and equals by birth are settled under primitive conditions, and have formed their rough codes of society. The intercourse with such people would be a capital invested for life. The next two years should be spent in the great towns of Europe, in order to remove awkwardness of manner, prejudices of race and feeling, and to get the outward forms of a European citizen. All this would sharpen his wits, give him more interests in life, more keys to knowledge. It would widen his

horizon. Then, and not a minute sooner, to the University, where he would go not as a child but a man capable of enjoying its real advantages, attend lectures with profit, acquire manners instead of mannerisms and a University tone instead of a University taint. What do you think?"

"It sounds a trifle revolutionary," commented the bishop, with a smile. "But it appeals to me. Education is a matter that lies very near my heart. In fact, I had some thoughts of retiring from the Church and devoting myself to it. I feel, I don't know why, as if I could do more in that direction."

Keith merely observed:

"That is interesting. Perhaps you have reached the end of the Church."

He liked this young Colonial bishop, and his straightforward, earnest face. Being of a complicated nature himself, he was always drawn towards men of single aims and purposes.

The other would have been pleased to know why Keith found it "interesting" and what he meant by that other phrase, but forbore to inquire. He was rather a silent man, though not deficient in mother wit. He lit a cigarette, and waited.

"Let us discourse of education!" said his host with that elaborate manner which the bishop afterwards discovered to be peculiar to him. "I think we need not differentiate between the sexes. In proportion as more careers are opened to women, their teaching will tend to converge with that of men. That specifically female education in domestic

arts has been rendered superfluous by commercial products. I will tell you what I think. A sound schooling should teach manner of thought rather than matter. It should have a dual aim—to equip a man for hours of work, and for hours of leisure. They interact; if the leisure is misspent, the work will suffer. As regards the first, we cannot expect a school to purvey more than a grip of general principles. Even that is seldom given. The second should enable a man to extract as much happiness as possible out of his spare time. The secret of happiness is curiosity. Now curiosity is not only not roused; it is repressed. You will say there is not time for everything. But how much time is wasted! Mathematics. . . . A mediæval halo clings round this subject which, as a training for the mind, has no more value than whist-playing. I wonder how many excellent public servants have been lost to England because, however accomplished, they lacked the mathematical twist required to pass the standard in this one subject? As a training in intelligence it is harmful: it teaches a person to underestimate the value of evidence based on their other modes of ratiocination. It is the poorest form of mental exercise—sheer verification; conjecture and observation are ruled out. A study of Chinese grammar would be far more valuable from the point of view of general education. All mathematics above the standard of the office boy should be a special subject, like dynamics or hydrostatics. They are useless to the ordinary man. If you

mention the utility of a mathematician like Isaac Newton, don't forget that it was his pre-eminently anti-mathematical gift for drawing conclusions from analogy which made him what he was. And Euclid—that frowsy anachronism! One might as well teach Latin by the system of Donatus. Surely all knowledge is valueless save as a guide to conduct? A guide ought to be up to date and convenient to handle. Euclid is a museum specimen. Half the time wasted over these subjects should be devoted to draughtsmanship and object-lessons. I don't know why we disparage object-lessons; they were recommended by people like Bacon, Amos Commenius and Pestalozzi. They are far superior to mathematics as a means of developing the reasoning powers; they can be made as complex as you please; they discipline the eye and mind, teach a child to discriminate between the accidental and the essential, and demand lucidity of thought and expression. And the hours spent over history! What on earth does it matter who Henry the Twelfth's wife was? Chemistry! All this, relatively speaking, is unprofitable stuff. How much better to teach the elements of sociology and jurisprudence. The laws that regulate human intercourse: what could be more interesting? And physiology—the laws that regulate our bodies: what more important? Our disrespect for the human frame is another relic of monasticism. In fact our whole education is tainted with the monkish spirit. Divinity! Has any purpose ever been served——"

Mr. Keith sighed.

"I wish I had not eaten so many of those prawns," he added. "What are you thinking?"

"I think modern education over-emphasizes the intellect. I suppose that comes from the scientific trend of the times. You cannot obtain a useful citizen if you only develop his intellect. We take children from their parents because these cannot give them an intellectual training. So far, good. But we fail to give them that training in character which parents alone can give. Home influence, as Grace Aguilar conceived it—where has it gone? It strikes me that this is a grave danger for the future. We are rearing up a brood of crafty egoists, a generation whose earliest recollections are those of getting something for nothing from the State. I am inclined to trace our present social unrest to this overvaluation of the intellect. It hardens the heart and blights all generous impulses. What is going to replace the home, Mr. Keith? And there is another point which has often forced itself upon me. A certain proportion of wealthy children tend to fall back into lower grades of life—manual labour, and so forth. They are born below the level of their parents. No difficulty about relapsing. But a fair percentage of the lowest classes tend to rise; they stand, potentially, above their surroundings. An apparatus has been contrived for catching these children. But it is defective, because devoid of sympathy. I have known hundreds of cases in the East End of London where families have been un-

able to raise themselves by this means because, at the critical moment, there was not twenty shillings in the house wherewith to buy clothes in which the child could present himself to a good employer with any prospect of success. Worthy of a better fate, he is pushed back. The chance is missed; the family remains in poverty. All kinds of profitable and honourable capacities are being wasted in this fashion every day—peculiar aptitudes for mechanics, talents for art, or music, or acting——"

"Acting!" interrupted Keith. "I am glad you reminded me. We are just in time to see some theatricals at the municipality. They only come off once a year. It would never do for you to miss them. No, never."

The bishop, rather regretfully, rose from his seat. He was feeling comfortable just then, and inclined to listen to a few more of Keith's educational heresies. But that gentleman seemed to have exhausted the subject, or himself.

"It is only a few minutes' walk," he observed. "We'll take a couple of sunshades."

They stepped into the broiling heat. The morning mists had rolled away from the mountains.

Walking along, Mr. Heard began to realize what a rambling and craggy sort of place this was. And how decorative! Almost operatic. The town was full of surprises—of unexpected glimpses upon a group of slender palms, some gleaming precipice, or the distant sea. Gardens appeared to be toppling over the houses; green vines festooned the door-

ways and gaily coloured porches; streets climbed up and down, noisy with rattling carriages and cries of fruit-vendors who exposed their wares of brightest hues on the pavement. Country women, in picturesque cinnamon-coloured skirts, moved gravely among the citizens. The houses, when not whitewashed, showed their building stone of red volcanic tufa; windows were aflame with cacti and carnations; slumberous oranges glowed in courtyards; the roadways underfoot were of lava—pitch-black. It was a brilliant medley, overhung by a deep blue sky. The canvas was indeed overcharged, as Denis had said.

"There are no half-tones in this landscape," the bishop remarked to Mr. Keith. "No compromise!"

"And yet perfect harmony. They are all true colours. I hate compromise. It is one of the curses of life. That is why I cannot endure England for long. The country is full of half-tones, not only in nature. Because a thing seems good, there must be some bad in it. It seems bad to us—therefore it must be good for us. Bedlamites! I like clean values. They make for clean thinking. This is the only day in the year," he went on, "when you will see the population abroad at this hour. The streets are generally quite empty. It is the only day when I would forgo my afternoon nap on Nepenthe."

"Nearly three o'clock," said the bishop, consulting his watch. "What a queer time for theatricals!"

"That Duke again. You can ask Eames about him; he must have been a man worth knowing. He

always slept in the afternoon. It annoyed him to think that his people slept too. He might suddenly want them for something, he said. He commanded that they should stay awake, and decapitated several hundred who were found napping. When he saw that the habit was ingrained in their natures and that nothing would avail save a total extermination of the populace, he gave way, gracefully. Then he instituted these popular theatricals in honour of the Patron Saint, and fixed them irrevocably for the hour of three o'clock. He meant to keep his faithful subjects awake on one afternoon of the year, at all events. He took it for granted that they could never resist a performance of this kind. He was right. He knew his people! That was ages ago. We shall find the place crammed this afternoon."

There was barely standing room, in spite of the sirocco heat. Mr. Keith, by means of some mysterious formula, soon procured two seats in the front row, the occupants of which smilingly took their places among the crowd at the back.

The bishop found himself sitting between his host and a distinguished-looking elderly gentleman who turned out to be Count Caloveglia. He was dressed in black. There was something alert and military in that upright carriage, those keen eyes, bushy black brows and snowy moustache. He uttered a few pleasant remarks on making Mr. Heard's acquaintance, but soon relapsed into silence. Absorbed in the spectacle, he sat motionless, his

chin resting in the hollow of his right hand.

"A fine type," Keith whispered into the bishop's ear. "You will like him. I call him the Salt of the South. If you are interested in the old Greek life of these regions—well, he gives you an idea of those people. He is the epitome of the Ionian spirit. I'll take you up to see him one of these days."

The performance consisted of a series of twelve scenes without words, representing the twelve chief episodes in the life of the Patron Saint, as portrayed in a certain marble frieze in the church. The actors were a handful of the more attractive and intelligent children of the place. They had been trained under the watchful eye of a priest who confessed to some notions of stage-craft and delighted in juvenile theatricals. It was a thrillingly realistic performance; the costumes—designed, long ago, by the Good Duke himself—varied with every tableau. Vociferous expressions of approval accompanied the performance. The Saint's encounter in the grove of Alephane with the golden-haired lady was a masterpiece of histrionic art; so was his solemn preaching among the black natives. Tears flowed freely at his violent death—a scene which was only marred by the erratic movements of his venerable beard; that mill-stone too, of *papier mâché,* played lovely pranks upon a pea-green ocean. Best of all was the cannibalistic feast of the Crotalophoboi ending with a tempestuous, demoniacal war-dance. Their blackened limbs emerging from the scantiest of vesture, the actors surpassed

themselves. Such an uproar of applause accompanied the orgy that it had to be repeated.

Every year it had to be repeated, this particular tableau. It was by far the most popular, to the intense regret of the *parroco,* the parish priest, a rigid disciplinarian, an alien to Nepenthe, a frost-bitten soul from the Central Provinces of the mainland. He used to complain that times were changed; that what was good in the days of the Duke might not be good for the present generation; that a scene such as this was no incentive to true religion; that the Holy Mother of God could hardly be edified by the performance, seeing that the players were almost nude, and that certain of the gestures verged on indelicacy and even immodesty. Every year he complained in like fashion: Ah, what would the Madonna say, if she saw it?

And every year the entire body of the local clergy, with Don Francesco as their eloquent spokesman, opposed his views.

The play was tradition, they avowed. Tradition must be upheld. And what more? It savoured of heresy to suggest that the Mother of God was blind to anything that happened on earth. Doubtless She saw this particular scene; doubtless She approved; doubtless She smiled, like everyone else. She loved her people in true motherly fashion. She was not born in the Central Provinces. She was fond of children, whether they wore clothes or not. The players enjoyed themselves. So did the audience. The Mother of God liked them to make a cheerful

show in honour of that good old man, the Patron Saint. And Saint Dodekanus himself—what would he think, if this ancient act of homage were withheld? He would be very angry! He would send an earthquake, or a visitation of the cholera, or a shower of ashes from the volcano across the water. Piety and prudence alike counselled them to keep in his good graces. And what more? The performance had been established by the Good Duke; and that endless line of godly bishops, succeeding each other since his day, would never have given their sanction to the costumes and the acting had they not known that the Madonna approved of them. Why should She now think differently? The Mother of God was not a fickle earthly creature, to change Her mind from one day to the next.

With arguments such as these they endeavoured to controvert the *parroco* who, being a fighter to the death, a resourceful ascetic of unbending will, never admitted defeat. He bethought him of other shifts. On one celebrated occasion he actually induced the bishop—tired as the old prelate was, after his morning's ride on the white donkey—to attend the performance, hoping to obtain from him some confirmation of his own view, that the objectionable scene should be entirely remodelled or, better still, cut out altogether. The reverend dignitary was supposed to be extremely short-sighted and wandering, moreover, in his mind, from sheer decrepitude. Perhaps he was wily beyond the common measure of man. Be that as it may,

he witnessed the spectacle but allowed nothing to escape his lips save a succession of soft purring sounds resembling:

gu-gu-gu-gu-gu-gu-gu-gu-gu-

an ambiguous utterance, which was construed by both parties as a verdict in their favour.

Mr. Heard, while conceding that the acting was good—first rate, in fact—could not make up his mind whether to be shocked or pleased. He wondered whether such a play had any features in common with religion. His host, who stood for paganism and nudity and laughter, convinced him that it had.

"You would have seen the same things in pre-Puritan England," he concluded, at the end of a long exposition. "And now, if you like, we will have a look at that Club. It may amuse you. There is still time for the Duchess."

Chapter VI

"This is the place," said Mr. Keith.

It was one of a row of tawdry modern buildings, the lower floors of which were utilized as shops—an undistinguished sort of place, in an undistinguished street. They climbed upstairs and wandered through two or three rooms, all alike save that one of them had a balcony; square, whitewashed rooms, not very clean, and inadequately furnished with tables, cane-bottomed chairs and a few prints on the walls. There was a lavish display, however, of bottles and glasses, and several shelves were littered with newspapers in different languages. Acetylene lamps hung from the flat ceiling. An odour of stale tobacco and alcohol pervaded the premises. Flies were buzzing against the window-panes.

Half a dozen nondescript members, looking considerably the worse for wear, loafed about moodily or snored in deck chairs. Two or three were writing letters. It was the sulkiest hour of the day. Mr.

Heard noticed a slender young Indian and a blond-haired fellow—probably a Scandinavian. They were arguing about cigars with a rosy-cheeked old reprobate whom they called Charlie. An adjoining apartment, the card-room, contained a livelier party, among whom the bishop recognized Mr. Muhlen. He had lost no time in making himself popular. He must have found congenial spirits here.

"Well?" asked Keith.

"Cheap and nasty," suggested the other.

"That's it! They call it the Alpha and Omega Club, to shadow forth its all-embracing international character. It's just a boozing institution, where you run to seed. They come in here, and say the south wind makes them thirsty. Red and Blue Club would be a more appropriate name. That is the whisky they have to drink."

"Why cannot they drink wine or—or ginger beer?"

"He tries to stop that. He would not be able to make any profits on wine."

"Who?"

"The President."

And Mr. Keith proceeded to sketch the history of the establishment.

The Alpha and Omega Club had led a precarious existence. Often its life dangled by a thread for lack of members, or because those members who owed subscriptions were unable or unwilling to pay them. Such had been the case before the accession of the new President. It hung its drooping

head; had almost withered away. Mr. Freddy Parker tended the languid flower, and watered it—with whisky of his own composition.

It revived. Or rather (which amounts to the same thing) Mr. Parker revived—sufficiently, at all events, to pay off some of the more pressing of his private debts. Napoleon, or somebody, once remarked: "L'état, c'est moi." Mr. Parker thought highly of a strong character like Napoleon. He used to say, when talking things over with his lady in her "boudoir" at the Residency:

"The Club, that's me."

Declaring that wine was the ruin of the place, he imported—it was the lady's idea, originally—the far-famed "Red and Blue" brand of whisky in barrels. The liquid was bottled in the cellars of the Residency. What happened during that process was never revealed. It was affirmed, none the less, that one barrel of the original stuff was more than enough for three barrelfuls of the bottled product. Cultured members, on drinking it, were wont to say things about Locusta and Borgia. The commoner sort swore like hell at Freddy Parker. It made you feel squiffy after the sixth glass—argumentative, magisterial, maudlin, taciturn, erotic, sentimental, sea-sick, ecstatic, paralysed, lachrymose, hilarious, pugilistic—according to your temperament. Whatever your temperament it gave you a thundering head next morning, and a throat like Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. It was known as "Parker's poison."

The stuff was served, at an alluring price, out of bottles adorned with a seductive label—a label which had been designed by an impecunious artist who, after running up a rousing bill for drinks, got off payment on the strength of this job. But the prettiest label in the world could not atone for the mixture within. Members often complained of feeling queer. They threatened to resign. Mr. Parker did not want them to resign; he wanted their subscriptions. He had a grand way with him on such occasions. Whenever one of them complained too bitterly or too persistently—became damned abusive, in fact—he would patiently wait and see which was the fellow's favourite newspaper. That point settled—it was his lady's idea, originally—he would stop the supply of the journal in question, alleging insufficiency of Club revenues. These Napoleon-like tactics generally brought the offending member to his senses.

Mr. Frederick Parker spent a good deal of his time in endeavouring to mask, under a cloak of boisterous good humour, a really remarkable combination of malevolence and imbecility. He was what you call a remittance man. He got so much a quarter—a miserable sum it was—to keep out of England. He travelled about formerly. But no amount of travel, no association with his betters, could pierce his stolid pachydermatous obliquity. He was the worst kind of Englishman; he could not even cheat without being found out. But for the wise counsels of his lady he would have been

in the lock-up over and over again. Such being the case, he took a justifiable pride in his Anglo-Saxon origin. Whenever a project seemed too risky —not worth while, he called it—he would say:

"It can't be done. That's a job for a dago. I'm an Englishman, you know."

He had knocked about the world a good bit, had Mr. Parker. His last known domicile was Nicaragua. There he invested in some land affair—a most unfortunate speculation, as it turned out. All his speculations had a way of turning out badly. That was because people, even people in Nicaragua, distrusted him for one reason or another; they said his whole existence was a tangle of shady and ignoble transactions—that he looked like a fraud, and behaved like one. He couldn't help his face; but his face, they soon discovered, was not the only, or even the most, evasive and fugitive part of his personality.

At last Nicaragua, even Nicaragua, got too hot for him.

There was Don Pomponio di Vergara y Puyarola, Nicaraguan Minister of Finance; one might come to terms with a man of that kind. One came to terms. It was arranged between them that His Excellency, who had a large family and many poor dependents, should take over Mr. Parker's landed interests; being a native of the place he might succeed in squeezing a little something out of them. In exchange for this concession an unobtrusive Government job was specially created for Mr.

Parker. He was appointed Financial Commissioner for South-Eastern Europe, to reside at Nepenthe or wherever else he pleased—unpaid: the exalted social status conferred by such a post being deemed ample compensation. His sole duty consisted in submitting a short annual report, a pure formality, to his Government.

He departed, but not alone. With him went his familiar spirit, his guardian angel, his lady, his step-sister—a dusky dame of barn-like proportions. Arrived at Nepenthe they rented a small villa, rather out of the way, which they called the Residency. The change of climate did him good. So did the appointment. He was now a person of consequence—the sole representative of a Foreign Power on the island. His official rank procured him not only dignity and a new start in life but, what was still more urgent, credit. It brought him into contact with the local authorities—with the red-haired rachitic judge, for instance, between whom and Mr. Parker there sprang up an intimacy which was viewed with vague forebodings. The lady, being a Catholic—Mr. Parker, too, was suspected of Roman proclivities—was confessed by the parish priest. That was a point gained; the *parroco* being above suspicion, among foreigners at least. She stayed mostly indoors, inventing scandals about people and writing voluminous letters to warn new-comers of the appalling immorality of the place.

To outward appearance the Commissioner and

his lady agreed like a brace of turtle-doves. He, too, was a moral and social reformer. But men must live. The refined social status attached to Mr. Parker's honorary post producing nothing tangible in the way of ready cash, he began to cast about for some means of livelihood. They were getting into debt once more. Something must be done, he declared.

His portly presence, flushed countenance, briar pipe, knickerbockers and white spats had already become a familiar object in the streets of the town, when a terrific uproar at the Club—one of those periodical, approximately monthly, rows at which the police, who hated meddling with foreigners, were reluctantly compelled to intervene—suggested to her that something might be done in that direction. She got him elected President for that year, President for the next, the next, and the next; in spite of the fact that, according to the rules, a new President had to be elected every year. Who cared about rules? He was the Commissioner! People were only too glad to have him there. In fact, like Napoleon, he became a sort of Dictator.

He was now in his element. There were emoluments to be picked up here—percentages, perquisites, and profits of all kinds. He made a little arrangement with the Club laundry-woman to take in his own washing as well, gratis. Under the threat of placing the Club custom elsewhere he concluded a number of treaties, each containing a secret clause which referred to fifteen per cent

profit for himself, with the grocer who supplied provisions; and with other tradespeople dealing in stationery, soap, crockery (broken crockery was a heavy item in the accounts) and such-like Club necessaries. Next, he took the landlord in hand. He would clear out, by God, and take more respectable premises if the rent were not reduced by twenty per cent! Scandalous! Downright robbery! The landlord being a reasonable sort of man, it was agreed that the old rate should stand in the contract, while the balance of twenty per cent found its way into Mr. Parker's pockets, and not, as heretofore, into his own. The same with the servants. From the boy who cleaned the rooms, and whom he changed as often as ever possible, he exacted a monetary deposit as a guarantee of good conduct —a deposit which was never returned, whatever his behaviour had been. Then—the subscriptions. For of course the accounts were never audited; nobody bothered about such things on Nepenthe, with all that south wind hanging about. If they had been, he would have squared the auditor up to any sum—a hundred francs, almost; it was worth while. Pickings, he called them. The place, the system, suited him down to the ground. He had lived all his life on pickings. He was a retail welsher; he lacked the nerve for sweeping enterprises.

On his accession, the Club was in such a state of demoralization, had become such a public scandal, that Mr. Parker, in his capacity of moralist, would have been the first person to dissolve that assembly

of topers and rakes. As financier, he meant to live by it. But how was the place to be purified?

Parker's poison solved that problem, besides yielding a fine slice of additional revenue. The hardest drinkers, the inveterate rowdies, refused to believe that it was anything but the ordinary whisky to which they had been accustomed from childhood; or believing, refused out of sheer boastfulness, or force of habit, to reduce their doses. While the moderate realized the truth and acted accordingly, these others insisted upon regarding it as genuine Scotch—with inevitable and dire results. They succumbed. During the first year of Freddy Parker's reign, eight of these stubborn sinners were carried to their graves. And year by year, the same causes being in action, the process of betterment went on. Extremists dropped off, moderates survived. The Club was purged of its grosser elements, the moral tone of the establishment was raised, through the operation of Parker's poison. It was Napoleon's way with the Paris Parliament, he once explained to his lady, who wondered vaguely how long the hero himself would have outlived the effects of that mixture which she brewed, with her own fair hands, in the dim vaults of the Residency.

Even now it was a pretty tough place. New crooks, like the dubious Mr. Hopkins, new fire-eaters, new cranks, new sots, were always dropping in from different corners of the globe to spread their infection among the more decent crowd of curio-hunters, gentlemen of commerce, nautical

wrecks, decayed missionaries, painters, authors and other vagrant riff-raff who frequented the premises. There were rows going on all the time—insignificant rows, mostly about newspapers and gambling debts. Mr. Samuel got his eye blacked over a harmless game of écarté; Mr. White, one of the steadiest members, threatened to withdraw his subscription on account of the black-beetles; a Swedish sea-captain smashed nine panes of glass—just by way of a friendly demonstration, he said—because the great Upsala journal, the *Utan Svafvel,* was missing from its shelf; a muscular Japanese made himself distinctly offensive about the *Nichi-nichi-shin-bum* being out of date, and was going to twist everybody's head off, if it occurred again; the excellent Vice-President, Mr. Richards, tumbled noisily downstairs, nobody knew how or why—all on a single afternoon. The sirocco happened to be particularly trying that day.

On the whole, there was no denying the fact that the Club flourished under the statesman-like autocracy of Mr. Parker. That was partly because, unlike previous presidents, he was generally on the spot. Some great man once made a remark about the need of "the Master's Eye." He believed in that remark. If you run a place, run it yourself. He was ever-present, absorbing at other people's expense his own poison, to the effects of which he seemed to be immune; and borrowing money, on the sly, from the richer and more forgetful members. His uproarious joviality, his echoing ha! ha! be-

came a feature of the place; it deceived the simple, and amused the complex. He was ready to talk about anything with anybody who shoved along; he had a fund of naughty tropical stories for the so-called bawdy section, and could be as sympathetic and pious as you please with a contrite youngster suffering from last night's debauch.

"A hair of the dog," he would suggest with a genial wink, pushing the bottle temptingly nearer.

The regulations had also been improved under his auspices. The entrance fee was imperceptibly raised, while the conditions of entry were relaxed. It was his lady's idea originally. She made it clear that the more numerous the members the greater the quantity of whisky consumed—the greater, therefore, their profits; quite apart from the possibility of additional subscriptions being paid. He agreed. Then, in a sudden glow of commercial enthusiasm, he proceeded to hint that ladies should also be admitted. Regretfully she put her foot down. Anywhere else the proposal would have been welcome. It was out of the question on Nepenthe.

"You're forgetting that Wilberforce woman," she said. "She would have to be carried home every night. It couldn't be done, Freddy. We might as well shut up the shop at once. People would get talking about the place—you know how they talk, as it is."

Miss Wilberforce was a pathetic local figure, a lady by birth, with a ready tongue, wiry limbs, and an insatiable craving for alcohol. She would

unavoidably have damaged the reputation of the place, to say nothing of its furniture. She had gone from bad to worse lately.

"Perhaps you're right, Lola. It isn't worth while for those few subscriptions. After all, I'm an Englishman. But how about all those Russians?" he added.

"I've often told you to let them in, Freddy."

"So you have, dear! It was your idea originally. Well, I must think it over again."

He thought it over and regretfully came to the conclusion that it could not be done. Russians were not people of the right kind. They were not honest.

"Russians are too artistic to be honest," he declared.

It was a bon mot which he had picked up, long ago, from Madame Steynlin, in the days when the lady looked with disfavour on the Muscovite colony. That Lutheran period was over for the present: she was orthodox so far as sentiments were concerned. Nothing could be good enough for the Russians, just then. An acquaintance with Peter, one of the handsomest of the whole batch of religious enthusiasts, had brought about her psychological conversion and altered her outlook upon life. Her heart was in the Urals. But that stupid malicious epigram had impressed itself on the mind of Mr. Parker, who was hopelessly insensitive to the flaxen curls of Peter.

"No," he decided. "They are not honest. We must draw the line somewhere, Lola. I draw it at

Russians. At least I think we ought to. But I'll think it over again."

That was foolish of him, she opined. For the Muscovites would probably have paid their accounts as regularly as other members; and as to their capacity for raising the Club revenues by the destruction of alcohol—why, many people had said unkind things about them, and yet nobody had gone so far as to accuse them of being unable to stow it away in proper Christian style. No wonder. Because there was nothing whatever in their Bible, the *Golden Book* of the divinely inspired Bazhakuloff, to prohibit or even limit the consumption of strong waters. In the matter of dietary he had only bidden them refrain from the flesh of warm-blooded beasts.

Mr. Parker was always thinking things over and coming to the wrong conclusion. It was foolish of him.

She knew him too well to say anything more for the moment. She would have to bide her time because Freddy, of whom she had made an exhaustive study, was a wobbler, and worse than a wobbler. He was stubborn at the wrong season and difficult to manage. He needed careful motherly guidance. All fools, she reflected, were subject to meteoric gleams of common sense. He was no exception to that rule. But whereas they received such flashes with thankfulness, he persisted in regarding them as inspirations of the devil. That was the tragedy of Freddy Parker. It made him into something

quintessential—a kind of super-fool. . . .

Mr. Keith enquired:

"You don't want to become a member of this institution, do you, Bishop?"

The other pondered awhile.

"I am pretty democratic," he replied. "We have some warm places in Africa, you know, and I never allowed myself to be beaten by them. Perhaps I might be of use to some of those poor fellows in there. But I like to do things properly. It would entail at first a little friendly drinking, I'm afraid, in order to gain their confidence. It is not in my character to do one thing and preach another. I cannot pose as an abstainer after the way I enjoyed your luncheon. But the smell of the whisky here —it scares me. My liver——"

"Ah, yes!" said Mr. Keith with a sigh. "No wonder you hesitate. It is quite disheartening, all that drunkenness."

Chapter VII

It stands to reason that the Duchess was not a Duchess at all. She was American by birth, from some Western state, and her first husband had been an army man. Her second spouse—he, too, had died long ago—was Italian. In view of his passionate devotion to the Catholic Church and of a further payment of fifty thousand francs, he had been raised to the rank of Papal Marquis. He died relatively young. Had his life been spared, as it ought to have been, he might well have become a Papal Duke in course of time. He was carried off by an accident not of his own contriving—run over by a tramcar in Rome—before that further ducal premium was even expected to be paid. But for this, he ought to have died a Duke. He would have been a Duke, by this time.

His widow, taking these things into consideration, felt it her duty to appropriate the more sonorous of the two titles open to her. Nobody con-

tested her claim. All her friends, on the contrary, declared that she talked like a peeress and behaved like one; and in a world where the few remaining authentic specimens of that class fail to fulfil either the one or the other of these conditions, it was thought meet and proper that somebody should be good enough to carry on, if only in semblance, and if only in Nepenthe, the traditions of a race rapidly approaching extinction. It was pleasant to be able to converse with a Duchess at any hour of the day, and this one was nothing if not accessible so long as you were fairly well clothed, had a reasonable supply of small talk and did not profess violent anti-papal sentiments.

Some people said she dressed like a Duchess, but there was less unanimity on this point. Her handsome oval face and towering grey hair induced her to cultivate an antique pose, with a view to resembling "La Pompadour." La Pompadour stood for something courtly and powdered. She certainly dressed better and on far less money than Madame Steynlin, whose plump figure, round sunburnt cheeks, and impulsive manner would never have done for an old-world beauty, and who cared little what frocks she wore, so long as somebody loved her. The Duchess had all the aplomb of La Pompadour, but not much of her French accent. Her Italian, too, was somewhat embryonic. That mattered little. The external impression, the grand manner, was everything. She was not lame, though she generally leaned on somebody's arm or a stick. It was rather

a pretty stick. She would have worn a pomander in her hair, or on a chatelaine, if anybody had told her what a pomander was. As her friends were unable to enlighten her—Mr. Keith even hinting that it was an object which could not be mentioned in polite society—she contented herself with a couple of patches.

Her rooms in that disused convent were an interminable suite of rectangular chambers, unpretentious but solidly built, with straight corridors running alongside. You beheld pretty pavements of old-fashioned tiles, not overmuch furniture, one or two portraits of the Pope, and abundance of flowers and crucifixes. The Duchess specialized in flowers and crucifixes. Everybody, aware of her fondness for them, gave her either the one or the other, or both. An elaborate arrangement for tea occupied one of the rooms; there was also a cold buffet for gentlemen—brandies and wines and iced soda-water and lobster sandwiches and suchlike.

A many-tongued conversation filled the air with pleasant murmurs. Various nationalities were represented, though the Russian colony was conspicuous by its absence. The Duchess, like Mr. Freddy Parker, drew the line at Russians. If only they would not dress so oddly, with those open collars, leathern belts, and scarlet blouses! The judge, also, was never asked to come—he was too outspoken a freethinker, and too fond of spitting on the floor. Nor did Mr. Eames put in an appearance. He avoided social obligations; his limited means preventing him from

making any adequate return. But there was an ample display of ecclesiastics, together with a few other notabilities. Mr. Heard encountered some familiar faces, and made new friends. He felt drawn towards Madame Steynlin—she had such a cheerful bright face.

"And how delightfully cool these rooms are!" he was saying to the Duchess. "I wonder how you manage to keep the sirocco out?"

"By closing the windows, Bishop. English people will not believe that. They open their windows. In comes the heat."

"If English people closed their windows they would die," said Don Francesco. "Half the houses in England would be condemned by law in this country and pulled down, on account of their low ceilings. Low ceilings have given the Englishman his cult of fresh air. He likes to be cosy and familiar and exclusive; he has no sense for broad social functions. There is something of the cave-dweller in every Englishman. He may say what he likes, but the humble cottage will always remain his dream. You can tell the ideals of a nation by its advertisements. This country is pastoral. That is why our advertisements are so apt to portray commercial conditions—enormous factories and engines and chimneys; we are dissatisfied with our agricultural state. The Frenchman's aspiration is woman; Paris hoardings will tell you that. England is a land of industrial troglodytes, where every man's cavern is his castle. Its advertisements depict either gross

masses of food such as cave-dwellers naturally relish, or else quiet country scenes—green lanes, and sunsets, and peaceful dwellings in the country. Home, sweet home! The cottage! That means open windows or suffocation. . . . I think I see the person who spoke to you on the steamer," he added to Mr. Heard. "I don't like his looks. He is coming our way."

"That must be Mr. Muhlen," exclaimed the Duchess. "They say he played beautifully at the hotel last night. I wonder whether I could induce him to try my Longwood? It's rather an old model, I fear, and out of tune."

The gentleman appeared, ostentatiously dressed, and escorted by Mr. Richards, the Vice-President of the Alpha and Omega Club, who seemed to be fairly steady on his legs, and was presently absorbed in an artistic examination of a number of silver ornaments, crucifixes, relics and suchlike objects of virtu, which the Duchess had gathered together. He handled them like a connoisseur. Others of that institution had promised to attend the party but, on being overhauled by the conscientious Vice-President, were found to be unpresentable at the last moment.

The Duchess moved away to greet him. Mr. Heard remarked to Don Francesco:

"That middle-aged colleague of yours, yonder—he has an unusual face."

"Our parish priest. A sound Christian!"

The *parroco's* thin lips, peaked nose, beady eyes

and colourless cheeks proclaimed the anchorite, if not the monomaniac. He flitted about like a draught of cold air, refusing all refreshments and not daring to smell the flowers, lest he should derive too much pleasure from them. He was often called Torquemada, from his harsh and abstemious habits. The name had been given him, of course, by his brother priests who knew about such matters, and not by the common people to whom the word Torquemada would have suggested, if anything, a savoury kind of pudding. Torquemada was capable of any sacrifice, of any enormity, in defence of the faith. A narrow mediæval type, he was the only person on Nepenthe who would have been hewn in pieces for his God—nobody else allowing themselves to be even temporarily incommoded in so visionary a cause. He enjoyed a reputation of perfect chastity which differentiated him from all the remaining priests and contributed, more than anything else, to his unpopularity. It enraged the frankly carnal natives to such an extent that they made insinuations about his bodily health and told other horrible stories, swore they were true, and offered to give statistical figures in confirmation. They said, among other things, that after begging money from wealthy foreigners for alleged repairs to the parish organ and other godly purposes, he kept the proceeds himself on the principle that charity began at home and ought to end there. Nobody could deny his devotion to mother, sisters, and even distant relatives. So much was also cer-

tain, that the *parroco's* family was poor.

Harp-like tinklings arose from an adjoining chamber; a general move took place in that direction. Mr. Keith was there. He sat beside Madame Steynlin who, being a fair performer herself, was listening with rapture to Muhlen's strains. During a pause he said:

"I wish I could make it out. It annoys me, Madame Steynlin, not to comprehend the charm of music. I would give almost anything to the person who can satisfy me that what I hear is not a succession of unnecessary noises."

"Perhaps you are not musical."

"That would not prevent my understanding the feelings of people like yourself. I don't want to be musical. I want to get a grip of this thing. I want to know. Tell me why you like it and why I don't. Tell me——"

The sounds began again.

"Ah!" said the Duchess, "that wonderful *andante con brio!*"

Then, as the strains grew louder, she whispered to Don Francesco upon a subject which had always puzzled her.

"I would be glad to learn," she said, "why our parliamentary representative, Commendatore Morena, has never yet visited Nepenthe. Surely it is his duty to show himself now and then to his parishioners—constituents, I mean? This festival of Saint Dodekanus would have been such a good opportunity. His appearance would have been a

discomfiture for the free-thinkers. Every year he promises to come. And every year he fails us. Why?"

"I cannot tell," replied the priest. "The animal has probably got other things to do."

"The animal? Ah, don't say that! And such a good Catholic!"

"Foreigners, dear Duchess, I leave to your judgment. They are of little account, anyhow. But you will be guided by me in your appreciation of the worldly qualities of natives. Otherwise, with all your intelligence, it will be impossible for you to avoid mistakes. Let us leave it at that."

"But why——"

"We will leave it at that, dear lady!"

"Indeed we will, Don Francesco," replied the Duchess, who loved to be ruled in matters of this kind.

At this moment, the performer rose from the piano with unexpected suddenness remarking *sotto voce* that if he had known he was to play on a spinet he would have brought some Lulli with him. He was beaming all over, none the less, and soon making arrangements with other guests for a series of picnics and boating excursions—getting on swimmingly, in fact, when the thoughtless Madame Steynlin captured him and began to talk music. He repeated that remark, too good to be lost, about the spinet; it led to Scarlatti, Mozart, Handel. He said Handel was the saviour of English music. She said Handel was its blight and damnation. Each being furnished

with copious arguments, the discussion degenerated into technicalities.

Denis, meanwhile, was handing round tea-cakes and things, with the double object of making himself useful and of being as near as possible to Angelina, the handmaiden of the Duchess, a bewitchingly pretty brunette, who was doing the same. Perhaps the existence of Angelina accounted for his respectful attentions and frequent visits to the Duchess. He felt he was really in love for the first time in his life.

He worshipped from afar. He would have liked to worship from a little nearer, but did not know how to set about it; he was afraid of troubling what he called her innocence. Hitherto he had scored no great success. Angelina, aged fifteen, with the figure of a fairy, a glowing complexion, and a rich southern voice, was perfectly aware of his idealistic sentiments. She responded to the extent of gazing at him, now and then, in a most disconcerting fashion. It was as though she cared little about idealism. She did not smile. There was neither love nor disdain in that gaze; it was neither hot nor cold, nor yet lukewarm; it was something else, something he did not want at all—something that made him feel childish and uncomfortable.

And another pair of eyes were watching, all the time, her sinuous movements—those of Mr. Edgar Marten. This young scientist, too, cherished loving thoughts about Angelina, thoughts of a more earthly and volcanic tinge; certain definite pro-

jects which made him forget, at times, his preoccupation with biotite, perlite, magnetite, anorthite, and pyroxene.

"Denis," said Keith, in his usual pompous fashion. "Do put down that absurd tray and let people help themselves. Listen to me for a moment. How do you like this place? I am not asking out of vulgar curiosity; I am anxious to know the impressions of a person of your age and antecedents. You might collect them for me, will you? Not now. One day when you are in the mood. Somewhat terrestrial and palpitating, is it not, after the cloistered twilight of a University?"

"I came here from Florence," observed Denis.

"And even after Florence! Do you know why? Because mankind dominates in Tuscany. The land is encrusted with ephemeral human conceits. That is not altogether good for a youngster; it disarranges his mind and puts him out of harmony with what is permanent. Just listen a moment. Here, if you are wise, you will seek an antidote. Taken in over-dose, all these churches and pictures and books and other products of our species are toxins for a boy like you. They falsify your cosmic values. Try to be more of an animal. Try to extract pleasure from more obvious sources. Lie fallow for a while. Forget all these things. Go out into the midday glare. Sit among rocks and by the sea. Have a look at the sun and stars for a change; they are just as impressive as Donatello. Find yourself! You know the Cave of Mercury? Climb down, one night

of full moon, all alone, and rest at its entrance. Familiarize yourself with elemental things. The whole earth reeks of humanity and its works. One has to be old and tough to appraise them at their true worth. Tell people to go to Hell, Denis, with their altar-pieces and museums and clock-towers and funny little art-galleries."

Everybody is always giving me advice, thought Denis. And the worst of it is, it's often sound.

A melodious voice added:

"If, after that lecture, you still have some crotchety appreciation left for the works of man, you may be interested, when next you visit the Old Town, to look at some busts and other curiosities of mine. There is a little Greek bronze I would like to show you, though perhaps we had better not talk too openly about it. Pray come. You will extract pleasure from that statuette. And I will extract pleasure from your company. Obvious sources of pleasure, aren't they, Keith?"

It was Count Caloveglia. He was referring to the Locri Faun, a wonderful antique which had recently been found on his property near the town of that name on the neighbouring mainland, and was about to be secretly smuggled out of Italy. He smiled in winning fashion as he spoke. Like everyone else, Denis had fallen under the spell of this attractive and courteous old aristocrat who was saturated to the very marrow in the lore of antiquity. There was sunshine in his glance—a lustrous gem-like grace; one realized from his conversation,

from his every word, that he had discarded superfluities of thought and browsed for a lifetime, in leisurely fashion, upon all that purifies and exalts the spirit. Nothing, one felt, would avail to ruffle that deep pagan content.

"And how," he continued, addressing Denis, "are your Italian studies progressing?"

"Fairly well, thank you. My French puts me out a little. And I can't yet conjugate properly."

"That is certainly a drawback," said Don Francesco, appearing on the scene. "But don't let it trouble you," he added in paternal tones. "It will come in time. You are still young. You are learning Russian, Madame Steynlin?"

"Only a few words." She blushed becomingly. "There are certain sounds, like water being poured into a jug—neither easy nor pleasant. I am not as quick as some people. Mrs. Meadows always speaks Hindustani to her old Sicilian woman. She comprehends perfectly."

"So clever these people are, at languages!" said the Duchess.

Marten remarked:

"I don't bother to learn Italian. I talk Latin to them. They understand all right."

"And what Latin, Marten!" laughed Denis. "No wonder they understand. I'm coming to you on Thursday morning. Don't forget."

"I have not had your public school advantages. But I manage to get what I want out of them, generally speaking," and he cast a fiery glance in

the direction of Angelina, who returned it over her shoulder, unabashed. Denis, fortunately, was looking the other way.

"I wish I had enjoyed all your chances," observed the Duchess, with a little mock-sigh. "We were so carelessly brought up. I learnt practically nothing at school. It is a pity. Ah, Bishop! I forgot to tell you. Such a charming note from your cousin. She cannot come. The baby is teething and troublesome in this heat. You will have to drive up, I'm afraid. . . . Mr. Keith, I have not yet thanked you for those flowers and the book you sent. The flowers are quite too lovely. Look at them! You are spoiling me—you really are! But I don't think I shall like the book. Lady Cecilia and her maid and that man, I forget his name—they do all sorts of things. They don't seem to be very nice people."

"You have nothing but nice people round you, Duchess. Why should you want to read about them? There is so much goodness in real life. Do let us keep it out of our books."

"That sounds a dreadful doctrine. I see the *parroco* is about to take his departure. Why does everybody leave so soon?"

She wandered away.

"The English are supposed to be bad linguists," said Don Francesco. "It is one of those curious international fallacies, like saying that the French are a polite nation——"

"Or that home-made marmalade tastes better than the stuff you buy in shops," added Denis. "I

must help the Duchess to say good-bye to those people. She likes to have some one handy on such occasions. She needs an echo. I am becoming quite a good echo."

"You are," said Keith, rather sharply. "Quite a pretty echo. And you ought to be a voice. Follow my prescription, Denis. The Cave of Mercury."

Chapter VIII

Count Caloveglia remarked:

"What a pity that Latin, as scholars' language, for the definition and registration of ideas, was ever abandoned! It has the incalculable advantage that the meanings of words are irrevocably fixed by authority. New ones could be coined as occasion required. Knowledge would gain by leaps and bounds. There would be a cross-fertilization of cultures. As things now stand, half the intellectuals of this world are writing about matters which, unbeknown to themselves, have already been treated by the other half. One would think that Commerce, which has broken down geographical barriers, might have done the same to political ones. Far from it! In sharpening men's lust for gold, it has demarcated our frontiers with a bitterness hitherto unknown. The world of thought has not expanded; it has contracted and grown provincial. Men have lost sight of distant horizons. Nobody writes for

humanity, for civilization; they write for their country, their sect; to amuse their friends or annoy their enemies. Pliny or Linnæus or Humboldt—they sat on mountain-tops; they surveyed the landscape at their feet, and if some little valley lay shrouded in mist, the main outlines of the land yet lay clearly distended before them. You will say that it is impossible, nowadays, to gather up the threads of learning as did these men; they are too multifarious, too divergent. A greater mistake could not be imagined. For there is a contrary tendency at work—a tendency towards unification. The threads converge. Mediæval minds knew many truths, hostile to one another. All truths are now seen to be interdependent; never was synthesis easier of attainment. Conflict of nationality and language hinders the movement. Mankind at large is the loser. The adoption of a universal scholars' tongue would do much to remove the obstacle. When these Southern races coalesce to form the great alliance which I foresee, when the Mediterranean basin is once more the centre of human activity as it deserves to be, some such plan will doubtless be adopted."

"Your notion would suit me down to the ground," said the bishop, who was a good Latinist. "I would love to converse in the old style with a student from Salamanca or Bergen or Khieff or Padua or——"

Don Francesco gave utterance to some wholly unintelligible speech. Then he observed:

"The student might not be able to catch your

meaning, Mr. Heard. I was only talking Latin! You see, we would be obliged to standardize our pronunciation. I wonder, by the way, why the old scholars' language was ever discarded?"

"Patriotism destroyed it," replied the Count. "That narrow modern patriotism of the cock-on-the-dung-hill type."

Mr Keith began:

"It is an atavistic and altogether discreditable phenomenon—this recent recrudescence of monarchical principles——"

"What did you promise about long words?" playfully enquired the Duchess, who had just returned.

"I cannot help it, dear lady. It is my mother's fault. She was so very precise. I was carefully brought up."

"That is a pity, Mr. Keith."

"Northern people are very precise," said Don Francesco, folding his gown around his ample limbs. "Particularly in love affairs. We down here, who live in this sirocco, are supposed to be calculating and mercenary in matters of the heart. We want dowries for our daughters—they say we are always coming to the point: money, money! The capacity of an English girl for coming to the point will take some beating. She paralyses you with directness. I can tell you a true story. There was a young Italian whom I knew—yes, I knew him well. He had just arrived in London; very handsome in the face, though perhaps a little too fat. He fell in love

with an elegant young lady who was employed in the establishment of Madame Elise in Bond Street. He used to wait for her to come out at six o'clock and follow her like a dog, not daring to speak. He carried a costly bracelet for her in his pocket, and every day fresh flowers, which he was always too shy and too deeply enamoured to present. She was his angel, his ideal. He dreamt of her by day and night, wondering whether he would ever have the courage to address so tall and queenly a creature. It was his first English love affair, you understand; he learnt the proper technique later on. For five or six weeks this unhappy state of things continued, till one day, when he was running after her as usual, she turned round furiously and said: 'What do you mean, sir, by following me about in this disgusting fashion? How dare you? I shall call the police, if it occurs again.' He was deprived of speech at first: he could only gaze in what you call dumb amazement. Then he managed to stammer out something about his heart and his love, and to show her the flowers and the bracelet. She said: 'So that's it, is it? Well, of all the funny boys. Why couldn't you speak up sooner? D'you know of a place round here——' "

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a formidable explosion on the part of the Commissioner, in an adjoining room.

He was talking to some friends about Napoleon.

They wanted a fellow like that on Nepenthe—a fellow who got things done. Napoleon would have

made no bones about the Wilberforce woman over there. It was a scandalous state of affairs. What was the use of a Committee for trying to keep her in order and getting her locked up in a sanatorium? Everybody knew what a Committee meant. Committee! It was a preposterous word. Committees were the same all the world over. Committee! He was in charge of that particular one; they were doing all they could, but what did it amount to? Nothing. To begin with, there was not enough money coming in, unless somebody could wheedle a cheque out of that rich old Koppen sensualist whose yacht might be arriving at any moment. And then her own pig-headedness! She refused to be talked over into doing what was in her own interests. Napoleon, he reckoned, might have talked her over—ha, ha, ha!

The lady in question, all unaware of these humanitarian designs, had taken up a strategic position in the neighbourhood of the drinks, and was glancing shyly round the room in search of a likely male who would fetch her a stiff glass of something from the buffet, and that soon. She was groggy, but not sufficiently primed to go there herself; she knew that everybody's eye would be fixed upon her; she had been much talked about of late. Drunk, she was impossible; dead sober, almost as bad—haughty, sullen, logical, with a grieved and surprised air suggestive of wounded dignity.

People avoided Miss Wilberforce. And yet you could not help liking her in those rare moments

when she was just a little disguised. She had a pretty wit, then; a residue of gentle nurture; tender instincts and a winsomeness of manner that captivated you. Nor were appearances against her. That frail, arrowy figure was invariably clothed in black. She wore the colour by instinct. They said she had lost her sailor fiancé who was drowned, poor lad, in the Mediterranean; and that she now wandered about at night looking for him, or trying to forget him and seeking oblivion in tipple.

The story happened to be true, for a wonder. She had received a twist for life. The death of this young lover gave to her impressionable being a shock which never passed off again. The world was turned inside out for Amy Wilberforce. She seldom spoke of his fate. But she was always talking about the sea. She tried to drown herself, once or twice. Then, gradually, she put on a new character altogether and relapsed into queer ancestral traits, stripping off, like so many worthless rags, the layers of laboriously acquired civilization. The refined and bashful girl became brusque, supercilious, equivocal. When sympathizing friends said that they had also lost lovers, she laughed and told them to look for new ones. There were better fish in the sea, etc., etc.

Soon she found herself abandoned, in spite of a full banking account. People had dropped her, right and left.

The years went by.

Calmly, without misgivings and without fervour, she took to the bottle.

JOHN AUSTEN.

Something drew her to Nepenthe—dim Mediterranean memories. Arrived there, she used to engulf three pints of Martell and Hennessey, one after the other, and then "wash them out"—such was her phraseology—with a magnum of Perrier Jouet; a proceeding which, while it heightened her complexion and gave a sparkle to her poor flustered eye, was not conducive to the preservation of equilibrium in the lower limbs. There resulted those periodical "nervous breakdowns" which necessitated seclusion and sometimes medical treatment. The collapses had become distressingly frequent within the last year or two. One of her many drawbacks was that she courted publicity in her cups. She was perfectly reckless as to what she then said, and had been known to bring a blush to the seasoned cheek of Don Francesco himself who, unaware of her condition at one particular moment, politely ventured to enquire why she always wore black and was told that she was mourning, as everybody ought to mourn, for his lost innocence. Being an Englishwoman, she was a thorn in the side of her moral compatriot the Commissioner.

Her noctambulous habits often brought her into contact with the local police and sometimes with His Worship Signor Malipizzo. Greatly to the surprise of Mr. Parker, the magistrate was observed to take a lenient view of the case. None the less, she had passed several nights in the local gaol. Staggering about the lanes of Nepenthe in the silent hours before dawn, she was liable to be driven, at the

bidding of some dark primeval impulse, to divest herself of her raiment—a singularity which perturbed even the hardiest of social night-birds who had the misfortune to encounter her. Taxed with this freakish behaviour, she would refer to the example of St. Francis of Assisi who did the same, and brazenly ask whether he wasn't good enough for them? Whether she couldn't give her last shirt to a beggar, as well as anybody else? In short, there was nothing to be done with her.

The dear lady, as Keith often called her, was becoming a real problem.

And now her eye, roving round the room, fixed itself with the drunkard's divine unerring instinct upon Denis. What a nice, modest, gentlemanly-looking boy! Just what she wanted.

"This sirocco!" she sighed, groping dramatically for a chair. "It makes me feel so funny. Oh, dear! I shall go off in a faint. Ah, do be a kind young man and fetch me some brandy and soda. A large tumbler. Ah, do! And very little soda, please—on account of my heart. Only the smallest drop!"

She took two or three sips, paused awhile as though undecided whether she could possibly swallow such nasty stuff and then, with a fine show of reluctance, gulped it all down. Denis was spellbound; the dose, he artlessly imagined, was enough to kill a horse. Far from being damaged, Miss Wilberforce took a chair beside him, and began to converse. Charmingly she talked; all about England. As he listened he grew delighted, entranced.

She was different, somehow, from all the other ladies he had lately met on the Continent. She was altogether different. Whence came it, he wondered?

Then, as the discourse proceeded, he began to realize what was the matter with them. It was odd, he thought, that he had not noticed it before. Miss Wilberforce made him realize wherein the difference lay. They spoke English, it was true; but they had all taken on a Continental outlook; alien phrases, expressions, affectations; cosmopolitan airs and graces that jarred on his frank, untarnished English nature. This one was otherwise. She was old England, through and through. The conversation cheered him to an unusual degree—among all those foreign people he felt strangely drawn towards this wistful lady who could talk so naturally and conjure up, by the mere power of words, a breath of his own homestead in the Midlands. He might have been sitting with an elder sister just then, eating strawberries and cream and watching a tennis match on some shady green lawn. He was happy; happier still when Angelina once more floated into his ken and, noticing Miss Wilberforce, raised her eyebrows mischievously and gave him something that looked like a real smile, for a change.

She had another smile, however, for Mr. Edgar Marten; and yet another one for Don Francesco who, as she passed near him, profited by the occasion to give her a paternal semi-proprietary chuck under the chin, accompanying the indecorous movement with an almost audible wink.

Mr. Heard had noticed everything. He frowned at first. It gave him a little twinge, and some food for thought. He was absurdly sensitive about women.

"A frolicsome child," he mused. "*Lasciva puella.* Possibly wanton."

What were this young man's relations with the girl? That contact of hand and chin—what did it imply? Was the action quasi-paternal, or pseudo-paternal? Regretfully he decided that it was only pseudo-paternal.

And yet—it was all so confoundedly natural!

"Nobody but our *parroco* could keep his hands off that girl," blithely remarked the priest.

Another little twinge. . . .

Chapter IX

Mr. Heard was not prone to wax enthusiastic over the delights of architecture or natural scenery. He called himself unexpansive and unromantic; he confessed to small understanding, small veneration, for artistic effects. The beauty of a man's character moved him more strongly than the beauty of any picture or any landscape. Yet, on arriving next afternoon at the upper plateau of Nepenthe he could not help being struck by the strange and almost compelling charm of the "Old Town." It was so different from the lower regions—so calm and reposeful.

Down below, in that more accessible modern settlement, everything was bright and many-tinted; there was movement and noise and colour; a dazzling spot! The subtle influence of the sea, though it lay four hundred feet lower down, was ever present; one felt oneself on an island. On reaching these heights that feeling evaporated. You

were embowered in mighty trees, in the midst of which stood the Old Town.

Unlike that other one, it faced due North; it lay, moreover, a few hundred feet higher up. That alone could not have explained the difference in temperature, one might say in climate, between the two. To begin with, there was on this tiny upland basin exceptionally deep soil, borne down by the rains of unnumbered centuries from the heights overhead and enabling those shady oaks, poplars, walnuts and apples to shoot up to uncommon size and luxuriance and screen away the sunny beams. From above, meanwhile, a perennial shower descended. The moisture-laden sirocco, tearing itself to shreds against the riven summits of the high southern cliffs, dripped ceaselessly upon this verdant oasis in clouds of invisible dew. You could often enjoy the luxury of a shiver, at night-time, in the Old Town.

It was a stronghold originally; built on these heights for the greater security of the islanders against Saracenic inroads. When a more peaceful era drew nigh the population began to decline; they found it more convenient to establish themselves in the new settlement lower down. Then came the Good Duke Alfred—that potentate who, as Mr. Eames was wont to say, *nihil quod tetigit non ornavit*. He took a fancy to this quaint old citadel which, before his day, could only be reached by a rough mule-track easily defended against invaders. After constructing a fine road of access with many

twists and turnings, wide enough to admit the passage of two of his roomy state carriages driving abreast, he turned his mind to other improvements. Professing to be an admirer of the good old times, he decided to keep up its traditional character—it was to remain a fortress, in appearance if not reality. A massive crenellated rampart, furnished with four gateways and watch-towers at convenient intervals but serving no purpose in particular, grew up around the place; every one of its houses which failed to fit in with the design of this battlemented structure—and there were a good many of them—was ruthlessly demolished. The Old Town was enclosed in a ring.

Desirous, next, of putting an end to the annoying exodus of the natives, he fixed by law the number of inhabitants; there were to be five hundred souls, neither more nor less. If in any one year the population exceeded that figure, the surplus was taken away, from among the adult males, to work as galley-slaves in his fleet; a deficiency in the requisite number was met by giving new husbands from the lower town, often three or four at a time "with a view to ensuring good results," to those of the native women who had hitherto failed to produce off-spring. The system worked well. With some trifling but reprehensive fluctuations, the birth-rate and death-rate remained even; things were at a standstill; a fact which caused His Highness to be compared, by a courtly panegyrist, to Joshua who bade the sun arrest his march across the Heavens.

Another of these gentlemen calls the Duke's action a "triumph of art over nature," adding, not without a grain of malice, that "never have the generative capacities of mankind adapted themselves with more conspicuous success to the shape of an unnecessary wall." Monsignor Perrelli, unfortunately, has nothing whatever to say on the subject. For reasons which will appear anon, he is remarkably silent on all that concerns the reign of his great contemporary.

Even so the Prince was not satisfied. The fastness was yet imperfect; he disliked the variegated hues of the buildings—they reminded him of the garish brilliance in the lower town. Something different had to be contrived. He took thought and, being a man of taste and a decorist where picturesque effects were concerned, decreed that the entire place—walls, houses, the two convents (Benedictine and Carthusian), the church, and even stables and pigsties—were to be painted a uniform pink: "pink," he ordained, "without the slightest admixture of blue." He desired, in fact, a kind of rose or flesh colour, a particular tint which, he foresaw, would look well among the luscious verdure of the surroundings. His behest, as usual, was obeyed without much loss of time.

Then he surveyed his work, and saw that it was good. He had created a gem. The Old Town was a symphony in emerald and coral.

So it remained. The inhabitants grew to be proud of their rosy citadel; it was an unwritten law among

them that every new house should adapt itself to this tone. For the rest, there was not much building done after his death, with the exception of a few isolated villas that sprang up, despite his old commands, in the neighbourhood. And the decline in population once more set in. Men forsook the place —all save the peasantry who tilled the surrounding fields. Towers and battlements crumbled to earth; roadways heaved uneasily with grassy tufts that sprouted in the chinks of the old paving-blocks. Sometimes at decline of day a creaking hay-waggon would lumber along, bending towards a courtyard in whose moss-grown recesses you discerned stacks of golden maize and pumpkins; apples and plum-trees, nodding drowsily over walls, littered the streets with snowy blossoms or fallen leaves. Commercial life was extinct. The few remaining shopkeepers wore an air of slumberous benevolence. The very stones suggested peace. A mellow and aristocratic flavour clung to those pink dwellings that nestled, world-forgotten, in a green content....

One of those few modern houses was the Villa Mon Repos. There was a curious history attached to the place. It had been built about a century ago at the orders of an eccentric French lady, a lyric poetess, who professed to be tired of life. She had heard that somewhere on Nepenthe was a towering precipice, unique of its kind and convenient for suicidal purposes. She thought she would like to live near that precipice—it might come in handy. There was nothing of the right sort in Paris, she

declared; only five-storey hotels and suchlike; the notion of casting herself down from one of those artificial eminences did not appeal to her high-strung temperament; she craved to die like Sappho, her ideal. An architect was despatched, the ground purchased, the house built and furnished. That done, she settled up her affairs in France and established herself at Mon Repos. On the evening of her arrival she climbed the little height at the back of her domain and looked southward, down a sheer wall of rock eight or nine hundred feet high, over the wrinkled ocean. It made her feel queer. Further familiarity with the precipice did not breed contempt; her visits to the site became rarer and rarer. She died, at a patriarchal age, in her bed, after writing a scholarly pamphlet to prove that the tale of Sappho's leap over her famous silvery crag was a myth, the "purest sensationalism," a fable of the grammarians "hopelessly irreconcilable with what we know of that great woman's character."

This much the bishop had learnt from Mr. Keith. That gentleman liked the Sappho story; he called it absolutely true to human nature and so creditable to the old lady's intelligence that he would have insisted upon paying his respects to her had she not expired a good many years before his arrival on the island. And he, of course, got it from Eames who, as annotator of Perrelli's *Antiquities*, was in the habit of garnering odd details anent private houses and so forth and had possessed himself, in the

course of his researches, of this particular pamphlet which he intended to reprint, together with others of its kind, in an appendix entitled "Contemporary Social History."

The driving road terminated at the Old Town. Mr. Heard, descending from his carriage, followed a pathway which had been described to him by Denis and soon found himself at the entrance of the Villa Mon Repos. It was an inconspicuous little place, surrounded by three or four chestnut trees and a rose garden. A steep incline at the back of the property ended, abruptly, in air. He concluded that the precipice must be on the other side of that slope and that, if so, it was rather too near the house for his taste. Mr. Heard thoroughly understood the feelings of the French poetess. He, too, was not fond of precipices. It was as much as he could do to look down from a church tower without growing dizzy.

On the house-steps, beside an empty cradle, sat a shrivelled hag—a gaunt, forbidding anatomy, with hooked nose and brown skin. Tousled grey hair, like that of a Skye terrier, hung over her forehead, half concealing a pair of coal-black eyes. She rose up, barred the entrance with one claw-like hand, and scrutinized him distrustfully.

"A Cerberus!" he thought. "This must be the old lady who understands Hindustani. Now I wonder if she knows English?"

She seemed to understand that language too; or perhaps his kindly face disposed her in his favour.

He was allowed to pass within.

The house was empty. Mrs. Meadows had presumably gone out for a ramble, taking the child with her. He sat down and waited, glancing round the premises. It was a peaceful sort of abode, pervaded by a strong sense of home. It appealed to the bishop who had domestic instincts and, despite his youth, was already a little weary of tossing about the world. He envied his cousin's happy married life. Would such an existence ever fall to his own lot? Although, like himself, she was only a bird of passage on Nepenthe, she had succeeded in impressing her personality upon those rather scantily furnished rooms and filling them with an atmosphere of England. Heavy bowls of fresh roses were ranged about. But what was she like, after all these years? Would she recognize him? Had she heard of his arrival on the island?

Mrs. Meadows failed to return. Perhaps she had met some friend or neighbour who was keeping her to dinner together with the child. The old woman seemed unwilling or unable to give him any information as to her whereabouts. After waiting an hour, he scribbled a short note, left it on the writing-table, and took his leave. The eyes of that fierce creature followed him right out of the garden. So did the scent of roses. . . .

Chapter X

The afternoon was drawing to its close as Mr. Heard, in a placid, contemplative frame of mind, once more drew nigh the pink ramparts of the Old Town, purposing to find his way home on foot.

He entered the most westerly of its four gateways. There were stone seats within the structure on either side of the road, convenient for sheltering from sun or rain. Passing under the vaulted roof he met Count Caloveglia, that handsome soldier-like personality, who instantly recognized him and greeted him in friendliest fashion.

"Will you do me the pleasure of coming to my house, and allow me to offer you a cup of tea? It is visible from here—that rounded portal, do you see? with the fig tree leaning over the street. Only a hundred yards. Or perhaps we can rest awhile under this archway and converse. It is always pleasant to watch the movements of the country-folk, and there is a peculiar charm in this evening

light. Well, let us sit down then. I observe you are interested in those people. A singular illusion, is it not?"

He referred to a group of men and boys who, stripped to the waist, were bearing aloft immense masses of some argent-coloured rock.

"You've guessed my thoughts," replied the bishop. "How on earth are they able to support such a weight? They remind me of Atlas with the world on his shoulders."

"It is pumice-stone—one of the old industries of the place. They excavate it on the hill-side yonder. Volcanic stuff. There are several suchlike indications of subterranean fires; a hot spring, for instance, which the people regarded with a kind of superstitious awe. It is dedicated to Saint Elias and believed to stand in mysterious sympathy with the volcano on the mainland. You will observe too, sooner or later, something fiery and incalculable in the temperament of the natives. Perhaps it is due to the wine grown on these scorching slopes. If geologists are right, we are sitting at this moment on the crater of a volcano——"

"Dear me! That might be rather awkward. I suppose this pumice is very light?"

"Light as foam. But who can believe it? The bearers move within a few feet of us, and yet it resembles the most ponderous limestone or granite. Then you ask yourself: How is it possible? If their burden were what it seems to be, they would be crushed to earth instead of striding proudly along.

Admirable figures! As you say, the spectacle takes one back into mythological times. Would you not call it a procession of Titans, children of the Gods, storing up mountain-blocks for some earth-convulsing battle? Your eyes deceive you. Like Thomas, the doubting apostle, you must touch with your hands. And even then you are not wholly convinced. To me, who know the capacity of human bone and muscle, these men are a daily miracle. They mock my notions of what is permissible. How hard it is, sometimes, to trust the evidence of one's senses! How reluctantly the mind consents to reality! The industry is decaying," he added, "but I hope it will outlive my time."

"Everything seems to decay up here in sober and gracious fashion. I am delighted, Count, with your Old Town. There is an autumnal flavour about the place. It is a poet's dream. Some philosopher might dwell here—some sage who has grown weary of disentangling life's threads."

Rarely did Mr. Heard use florid and sentimental language like this. The soft light, the reposeful surroundings, the homelike influence of the Villa Mon Repos—all had conspired to put him into an uncommonly idyllic mood of mind. He felt disposed to linger with the kindly stranger who seemed so much more communicative and affable than on the occasion of those theatricals. He lit a cigarette and watched, for a while, the flow of life through that gateway. Its passage was pierced, like the eye of a needle, with a slender shaft of light from the

westering sun. Fine particles of dust, suspended overhead, enveloped the homeward moving peasantry in a tender mist of gold.

"Yes," replied the Count. "This citadel is a microcosm of what the world might be, if men were reasonable. Not all men! A great proportion must be good enough to remain what they are. We could not live without those whose business it is to bring the reasonableness of the few into its proper relief. Were it otherwise, there would be no more reasonableness on earth, would there?"

"And that would be a pity," observed Mr. Heard. "I was much interested, Count, in what you said yesterday. You spoke of the Mediterranean becoming once more the centre of human activity. There is an attraction in the idea to one who, like myself, has been brought up on the classics and has never forgotten his spiritual debt to antiquity. But I question whether the majority of my countrymen would be moved by such considerations."

The old man replied:

"I think we need not trouble about majorities. No one can expect a majority to be stirred by motives other than ignoble. Your English majority, in particular, is quite unaware of its debt to us: why should it turn eyes in our direction? But as for other northern men, the enlightened ones—I cannot help thinking that they will come to their senses again one of these days. Oh yes! They will recover their sanity. They will perceive under what artificial and cramping conditions, under what false

standards, they have been living; they will realize the advantages of a climate where nature meets you half-way. I know little of England, but the United States are pretty familiar to me; the two climates, I imagine, cannot be very dissimilar. That a man should wear himself to the bone in the acquisition of material gain is not pretty. But what else can he do in lands adapted only for wolves and bears? Without a degree of comfort which would be superfluous hereabouts, he would feel humiliated. He must become strenuous if he wishes to rise superior to his inhospitable surroundings."

"We think a good deal of strenuousness," objected the bishop.

"Have you not noticed that whenever anything, however fantastic, is imposed upon men by physical forces, they straightway make a god of it? That is why you deify strenuousness. You dare not forgo it. The Eskimo doubtless deifies seal-blubber; he could not survive without it. Yet nobody would be an Eskimo if he had a chance of bettering his condition. By all means let us take life seriously. But let us be serious about things that matter."

"Things that matter, Count! Is it not creditable for a man to support his wife and family in the best conditions possible?"

"Assuredly. But chosen spirits will do this in regions where the same results can be obtained with a smaller outlay of vital force. We have only a certain amount of energy at our disposal. It is not seemly to consume every ounce of it in a con-

test with brute nature. Man is made for better things. Whatever fails to elevate the mind is not truly profitable. Tell me, sir, how shall the mind be elevated if the body be exhausted with material preoccupations? Consider the complex conditions under which a northern family is obliged to live. Think of the labour expended upon that unceasing duel with the elements—the extra clothing and footwear and mufflers and mantles, the carpets, the rugs, the abundant and costly food required to keep the body in sound working condition, the plumbing, the gas, the woodwork, the paintings and repaintings, the tons of fuel, the lighting in winter, the contrivances against frost and rain, the never-ending repairs to houses, the daily polishings and dustings and scrubbings and those thousand other impediments to the life of the spirit! Half of them are non-existent in these latitudes; half the vitality expended upon them could therefore be directed to other ends. At close of day, your northerner is pleased with himself. He has survived; he has even prospered. His family is adequately housed and clothed. He feels 'presentable,' as he calls it, in the eyes of those who share his illusions. He fancies he has attained the aim and object of existence. He is too dazed with the struggle to perceive how incongruous his efforts have been. What has he done? He has sacrificed himself on the altar of a false ideal. He has not touched the fringe of a reasonable life. He has performed certain social and political duties—he knows nothing of duties

towards himself. I am speaking of men from whom better things might have been expected. As for the majority, the crowd, the herd—they do not exist, neither here nor anywhere else. They leave a purely physiological mark upon posterity; they propagate the species and protect their offspring. So do foxes. It is not enough for us. Living in our lands, men would have leisure to cultivate nobler aspects of their nature. They would be accessible to purer aspirations, worthier delights. They would enjoy the happiness of sages. What other happiness deserves the name? In the Mediterranean, Mr. Heard, lies the hope of humanity."

The bishop was thoughtful. There occurred to him various objections to this rather fanciful argument. Still, he said nothing. He was naturally chary of words; it was so interesting to listen to other people! And at this particular period he was more than usually reflective and absorbent.

Happiness—an honourable, justifiable happiness —how was it to be attained? Not otherwise, he used to think, than through the twofold agency of Christianity and civilization. That was his old College attitude. Imperceptibly his outlook had shifted since then. Something had been stirring within him; new points of view had floated into his ken. He was no longer so sure about things. The structure of his mind had lost that old stability; its elements seemed to be held in solution, ready to form new combinations. China had taught him that men can be happy and virtuous while

lacking, and even scorning, the first of these twin blessings. Then had come Africa, where his notions had been further dislocated by those natives who derided both the one and the other—such fine healthy animals, all the same! A candid soul, he allowed his natural shrewdness and logic to play freely with memories of his earlier experiences among the London poor. Those experiences now became fraught with a new meaning. The solemn doctrines he had preached in those days: were they really a panacea for all the ills of the flesh? He thought upon the gaunt bodies, starved souls, and white faces—the dirt, the squalor of it! Was that Christianity, civilization?

The Count, pursuing some other line of thought, broke out into a kind of Delphic rhapsody:

"Folly of men! The wits of our people have been blunted, their habits bestialized, their very climate and landscape ruined. The alert genius of the Greeks is clogged by a barbaric, leadenhued religion—the fertile plains of Asia Minor and Spain converted into deserts! We begin, at last, to apprehend the mischief; we know who is to blame; we are turning the corner. Enclosed within the soft imagination of the *homo mediterraneus* lies a kernel of hard reason. We have reached that kernel. The northerner's hardness is on the surface; his core, his inner being, is apt to quaver in a state of fluid irresponsibility. Yet there must be reasonable men everywhere; men who refuse to wear away their faculties in a degrading effort to plunder one

another, men who are tired of hustle and strife. What, sir, would you call the phenomenon of to-day? What is the outstanding feature of modern life? The bankruptcy, the proven fatuity, of everything that is bound up under the name of western civilization. Men are perceiving, I think, the baseness of mercantile and military ideals, the loftiness of those older ones. They will band together, the elect of every nation, in god-favoured regions round the Inland Sea, there to lead serener lives. To those who have hitherto preached indecorous maxims of conduct they will say: 'What is all this ferocious nonsense about strenuousness? An unbecoming fluster. And who are you, to dictate how we shall order our day? Go! Shiver and struggle in your hyperborean dens. Trample about those misty rain-sodden fields, and hack each other's eyes out with ante-diluvian bayonets. Or career up and down the ocean, in your absurd ships, to pick the pockets of men better than yourselves. That is your mode of self-expression. It is not ours'. And Mediterranean people will lead the way. They have suffered more than all from the imbecilities of kings and priests and soldiers and politicians. They now make an end of this neurasthenic gadding and getting. They focus themselves anew and regain their lost dignity. That ancient individualistic tone reasserts itself. Man becomes a personality once more——"

He continued for some time in this prophetic strain, the bishop listening with considerable ap-

probation though, at a certain point of the discourse, he would have liked to drop a word about Thermopylæ and Marathon. He also knew something of the evils of northern industrialism—how it stunts the body and warps the mind.

"What a charming dreamer!" he thought.

It was rather convenient for the Count to be able to pass, just then, for a dreamer.

As a matter of fact, he was an extremely practical old gentleman.

Chapter XI

"Sanidin?" queried Denis almost flippantly, as he held up a fragment of rock.

He was not particularly eager to hear Marten's answer. He had thought, only a few days ago, that he would like to be a geologist; Marten had inspired him with a fancy for that science. The fit was already passing.

How quickly this geological mood had evaporated. How quickly everything evaporated, nowadays.

All was not well with Denis. Early that morning he had tried his hand at poetry once more, after a long interval. Four words—that was all the inspiration which had come to him.

"Or vine-wreathed Tuscany . . ."

A pretty turn, in the earlier manner of Keats. It looked well on the snowy paper. "Or vine-wreathed Tuscany." He was content with that

phrase, so far as it went. But where was the rest of the stanza?

How easily, a year or two ago, could he have fashioned the whole verse. How easily everything was accomplished in those days. To be a poet: that was a fixed point on his horizon. Any number of joyous lyrics, as well as three plays, not intended for the stage, had already dropped from his pen. He was an extraordinary success among his college friends; everybody liked him; he could say and do what he pleased. Was he not the idol of a select group who admired not only one another but also the satanism of Baudelaire, the hieratic obscenities of Beardsley, the mustiest Persian sage, the modernest American ballad-monger? He was full of gay irresponsibility. Ever since, on returning to his rooms after some tedious lecture, he announced to his friends that he had lost an umbrella but preserved, thank God, his honour, they augured a brilliant future for him. So, for other but no less cogent reasons, did his doting, misguided mother.

Both were disappointed. Those sprightly sallies became rarer; epigrams died, still-born, on his lips. He lost his sense of humour; grew mirthless, fretful, self-conscious. He suddenly realized the existence of a world beyond his college walls; it made him feel like a hot-house flower exposed to the blustering winds of March. Life was no longer a hurdle in a steeplechase to be taken at a gallop; it was a tangle of beastly facts that stared you in the face and refused to get out of the way. With growing

years, during vacation, he came in contact with a new set of people; men who smiled indulgently at mention of all he held most sacred—art, classics, literature; men who were plainly not insane and yet took up incomprehensible professions of one kind or another—took them up with open eyes and unfeigned zest, and actually prospered at them in a crude worldly fashion.

He shrank at first from their society, consoling himself with the reflection that, being bounders, it did not matter whether they succeeded or not. But this explanation did not hold good for long. They were not bounders—not all of them. People not only dined with them: they asked them to dinner. Quite decent fellows, in fact. Nothing was wrong with them, save that they held a point of view which was at variance with his own.

It was a rude awakening. Every moment he was up against something new. There were quite a lot of things, he discovered, which a fellow ought to know, and doesn't. Too many of them to assimilate with comfort. They crowded in upon him and unsettled his mind. He kept up a brave exterior, but his inner core was suffering; he was no longer certain of himself. He became easily swayed and changeful in his moods. That sure touch in lyrics, as in daily life, was deserting him. His dreams were not coming true. He was not going to set the Thames on fire with poetry or anything else. He would probably be a failure. Aware of this weakness, he looked up to what was strong. Everything

different from himself, everything forceful, emphatic and clear-cut, exercised a fascination upon him. He tried in an honest, groping fashion, to learn what it was all about. That was why he had taken to Edgar Marten, the antithesis of himself, bright but dogmatic, a slovenly little plebeian but a man who after all had a determined, definite point of view.

Denis repeated:

"Sanidin?"

"Let's have a look at it then," said Marten condescendingly, "though I can't say I'm in a geological temper this morning. The south wind seems to rot one's intelligence somehow. Hand it here. Sanidin be blowed! It's specular iron. Now I wonder why you should hit upon sanidin? Why?"

He, too, did not pause for a reply. He turned his glance once more down the steep hill-side which they had climbed with a view to exploring some instructive exposure of the rock. Marten intended to utilize the site as a text for a lay sermon. Arrived at the spot they had sat down. As if by common consent, geology was forgotten. To outward appearances they were absorbed in the beauties of nature. Sirocco mists rose upwards, clustering thickly overhead and rolling in billowy formations among the dales. Sometimes a breath of wind would convulse their ranks, causing them to trail in long silvery pennants across the sky and, opening a rift in their gossamer texture, would reveal, far down below, a glimmer of olives shining in the sunlight

or a patch of blue sea, framed in an aureole of peacock hues. Stones and grass were clammy with warm moisture.

"It's a funny thing," said Marten, after a long pause. "I've often noticed it. When I'm not actually at work, I'm always thinking about girls. I wish I could talk better Latin, or Italian. Not that I would be running after them all day long. I've got other fish to fry. I've got to catalogue my minerals, and I'm only half-way through. For the matter of that, I haven't come across half as many nice ones here as I thought I would."

"Minerals?"

"Girls. I don't seem to take to these foreigners. But there's one——"

"Go on."

"You're a queer fellow, Phipps. Don't you ever look at women? I believe you have the makings of a saint in you. Fight against it. A fellow can't live without vices. Here you are, with lots of money, stewing in a back bedroom of a second-class hotel and getting up every morning at five o'clock because you like lying in bed late. Is that your way of mortifying the flesh? Got a soul, eh? Get rid of it. The soul! That unhappy word has been the refuge of empty minds ever since the world began. You're just like a man I used to know at Newcastle. You can't think what an ass he was. A sort of eugenical crank, who talked about the City Beautiful where everybody would lead regenerated lives like a flock of prize sheep. Everything sanitary and

soulful; nothing but pure men and pure women. An addle-headed theorist, he was, till a woman got hold of him—one of the other kind, you know—and gave him something practical to think about. That's what will happen to you, Phipps. I can see it coming."

"I've been analysing myself lately. I find I have too much romance in my composition, as it is."

"What do you call romance?"

Denis thought awhile. Then he said:

"When a man invests ordinary people or objects or occurrences with an extraordinary interest. When he reads attributes into them which they don't possess, or exaggerates those which they do possess. When he looks at a person and can't help thinking that there is nobody on earth quite like her."

"Too celestial for me, on the whole. But I'm glad you said that last part. Glad for your sake, I mean. It shows that you've perhaps got something better than a soul, after all."

"What is that?"

"A body. Look here, Phipps. I also have my romantic moments, though you wouldn't believe it. I can be as romantic as ever you please. But not when I'm alone."

"I should like to see you in that condition. And talking Latin, no doubt?" he added with a laugh.

"I daresay you would," replied the scientist. "Given the circumstances under which I become romantic, you'll find it a little difficult. But there's

no knowing. Funny things happen sometimes!"

Denis had picked up another stone. He scrutinized it with close attention, and then began to turn it round and round in his hand in an absent-minded fashion. At last he remarked:

"We are not doing much mineralogy, are we? What do you think of chastity, Marten?"

"Chastity be blowed. It's an unclean state of affairs, and dangerous to the community. You can't call yourself a good citizen till you have learnt to despise it from the bottom of your heart. It's an insult to the Creator and an abomination to man and beast."

"Perhaps you never gave it a fair trial," suggested Denis.

"Perhaps I'm not quite such a damned fool as all that. A man needn't handle everything dirty in order to be doubly sure about it. If you tell me that a dead donkey smells bad, I'm quite prepared to believe you without poking my nose into it. Chastity is a dead donkey. No beating will bring it to life again. Who killed it? The experience of every sane man and woman on earth. It's decayed; it ought to be buried. You ask me to give it a trial. Perhaps I will, when I'm in the same mellow condition myself. Everything in its proper season. Don't let us reverse the natural order of things. When we cease to practise, then is the time to preach. A fellow of your size! And with your good looks, too. Who knows how many golden opportunities you've missed. Try to make up for

lost time, Phipps. Get rid of conventional notions, if you value your health."

"I will, when I find them wrong. What do you think of women—generally speaking, I mean?"

Marten replied, without a moment's hesitation:

"Thank God I'm a Jew. You must take that into consideration. I think the Mormons have made a good shot at solving the woman question, if the question exists at all. Mormonism is a protest against monogamy. And please observe that it's a protest not on the part of man alone. It's a protest on the part of woman. Never forget that. In fact, I don't believe any woman would ever bind herself to one fool of a man if she had her own way. She wouldn't marry at all. She needn't nowadays. She won't, very soon. A man who marries—well, there may be some excuse for him, though a love-match is generally a failure and a money-match always a mistake. The heroes, the saints and sages —they are those who face the world alone. A married man is half a man."

"Ahem!"

Marten was silent.

"I did not ask you to stop," said Denis. "You've got it very pat!"

"Plain sailing, my boy. It's the social reformers and novelists who create these artificial conundrums; they want to sell their rotten literature; they want to make us forget that the only interesting and important part of the business is what nobody talks or writes about. What does it all amount

to? Man creates intellectually and physically. He classifies minerals or blasts out a tunnel. Woman creates physiologically; she supplies the essential, the raw material; her noblest product is a child. I get on splendidly with women, because we both realize the stupidity of the average sex-twaddle. We have no illusions about each other. We know exactly what we are after. We know exactly how to attain it. I tell you what, Phipps, Female Emancipation is going to do away with a lot of cant and idealism. Knock the silly male on the head. There'll be an end of your chastity-worship, once women are fairly started on the game. They won't put up with it."

"Disgusting," said Denis. "Go on."

"I'm done. What, sanidin again?"

Denis still held the stone in his hand. He was thinking, however, of other things. He liked to collect fresh ideas, to be impregnated with the mentality of other people—he knew how much he had to learn. But he would have preferred his mind to be moulded gently, in artistic fashion. Marten's style was more like random blows from a sledge-hammer, half of them wide of the mark. It was not very edifying, or even instructive. Keith was the same. Why was everybody so violent, so extreme in their views?

Marten repeated:

"Sanidin?"

"It might be sanidin in places," replied Denis. "I do know a little something about crystals, Marten.

I have read Ruskin's *Ethics of the Dust.*"

"Ruskin. Good God! He's not a man; he's an emetic. But you never answered my first question. You always hit upon sanidin. Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's rather a pretty word, don't you think? It would do for a Christian name. Girls' names are so terribly commonplace. They are always Marjorie, or something. If I had a daughter, I should call her Sanidin."

"You're not likely to find yourself in that position, at this rate. If I had a daughter, I know perfectly well what I should call her."

"What?"

"Angelina."

"You would?" asked Denis slowly. "And why?"

"Oh, it's rather a pretty name, don't you think?"

"Not a bad name at all, now I come to think of it. But it sounds foreign. I thought you did not care about foreigners."

"I don't. But there's one——"

"Go on," said Denis.

Mr. Marten winked.

The mists had fled from the hill-tops; rocks and vineyards, and the sea at their foot, lay flooded in sunshine. With one accord, the two young men rose from the ground and turned their steps homewards. The mineralogical lesson was over.

"Coming to Keith's to-night?" enquired Marten with a fine show of nonchalance.

"I don't know."

"I would if I were you. They say he does things

properly. There'll be an awful crowd—a regular bust-up. He only gives one of these entertainments a year. Dancing and Chinese lanterns and champagne in torrents. Won't you go?"

"Perhaps later in the evening."

Denis was perturbed. He scented a rival in this brutalitarian, though it seemed hardly possible that Angelina should take much notice of him. Meanwhile, he felt in need of some gentlemanly and soothing influence, after such an outpouring of vulgarity. He thought of the bibliographer. He liked Eames; he admired that scholarly detachment. He, too, might end in annotating some masterpiece—who knows? To be a bibliographer —what a calm, studious life!

"I think I'll go to Eames," he remarked.

"Really? A colourless creature, that Eames. As dry as a stick; a typical don. I promised him a mineralogical map, by the way. You might tell him I haven't forgotten, will you? I wonder what you can see in the man?"

"I rather like him," said Denis. "He knows what he wants."

"That is not enough, my young friend!" replied Marten with decision. "A fellow must want something sensible."

"What do you call sensible?"

"Sanidin, and things like that. Things with pretty names. Eh, Phipps?"

Denis said nothing.

His friend continued jovially:

"The tavern mood is upon me. I am going to Luisella's to get a drink. One gets sick of that Club. Besides, I've taken rather a fancy to that younger sister. The second youngest, I mean; the one with the curly hair—you know! I only wish I knew a bit more Latin."

Luisella's grotto-tavern had become quite a famous rendezvous. You could drop in there at any hour and always find company to your liking. Don Francesco had a good deal to do with its discovery; he discovered, at all events, the second eldest of the four orphan sisters who managed the house. After a time, having convinced himself that they were all good penitents and being a kindly sort of man, he thought that other people might like to share in the seductions which the place afforded. He took foreign friends there from time to time, and none were disappointed. The wine was excellent. Russians, excluded from the Club by Mr. Parker's severity, frequented the spot in considerable numbers. They were nicely treated there. Not many nights previously one of the Master's disciples, the athletic young Peter Krasnojabkin who was credited with being a protégé of Madame Steynlin's, had distinguished himself by drinking sixteen bottles at a sitting. He afterwards smashed a few chairs and things, for which he apologized so prettily next morning that the girls would not hear of his paying for the damage.

"It's all in the family," they said. "Come and break some more!"

That was the way they ran the place, as regards drinks. The quality of the refreshments, too, was quite out of the common. As for the girls themselves—their admirers were legion. They could have married anyone they pleased, had it not been more in accordance with the interests of their business, to say nothing of their personal inclinations, to have only lovers.

As Marten disappeared under that hospitable doorway, it flashed through the mind of Denis that Eames was a confirmed recluse; he might not like being disturbed in the morning.

Besides, he was probably at work.

He thought of going to see the bishop. There was a glamour in the name. To be a bishop! His mother had sometimes suggested the Church, or at least politics as a career for him, if poetry should fail. But this one was so matter-of-fact and unpretentious in his clothing, his opinions. A broken-down matrimonial agent, Don Francesco had called him. Mr. Heard was not his ideal of a shepherd of souls; he was only a colonial, anyhow. A grey type of man—nothing purple about him, nothing glowing or ornate. He did not get on particularly well with him either.

Besides, he hardly knew him sufficiently to intrude at this hour of the day.

One thing was certain. He would go to the Cave of Mercury that very evening. Keith was right. He must try to "find himself." He wanted to be alone, to think things out. Or perhaps—no. He

did not want to be alone with his thoughts. They were too oppressive just then. He required some kind of company .

Besides, Keith had said "full moon." The moon was not yet quite full.

No!

He would see what the Duchess was doing, and perhaps stay to luncheon. Eames could wait. So could the bishop. So could the cave. He was fond of the Duchess.

Besides, it was such a quaint place—that austere old convent, built by the Good Duke Alfred.

Chapter XII

"That is the worst of dining with a man. You have to be civil next morning. But surely, Eames, we two need not stand on ceremony? I am particularly anxious for you to come tonight. Can't you really manage it? I want you to meet Malipizzo and say a few nice words to him. You are too aloof with that man. There is nothing like keeping on the right side of the law."

"What do you mean by that?"

"The right side of the judge," said Keith. "It is so easy to be polite to people, and so advisable in some cases. How would you like to spend a week or two in gaol? He will have you there one of these days, unless you have placed him under some kind of obligation. He represents justice here. I know you don't like him. But what would it cost you—just a friendly handshake?"

"He cannot touch me. I have nothing on my conscience."

"Conscience, my dear fellow, is a good servant but a bad master. Your sentiments are English. They will never do in a country where the personal element still counts for something."

"The personal element signifying favouritism and venality?" asked Eames. "A pretty state of affairs!"

"The philosopher can only live under a venal government."

"I disagree with you altogether."

"You always disagree with me," answered Keith. "And you always find yourself in the wrong. You remember how I warned you about that little affair of yours? You remember what an ass you made of yourself?"

"What little affair?" enquired Eames, with a tinge of resignation in his voice.

The other did not reply. Mr. Keith could be tactful, on occasions. He pretended to be absorbed in cutting a cigar.

"What little affair?" insisted the bibliographer, fearful of what was coming next.

It came.

"Oh, that balloon business. . . ."

It was not true to say of Mr. Eames that he lived on Nepenthe because he was wanted by the London police for something that happened in Richmond Park, that his real name was not Eames at all but Daniels—the notorious Hodgson Daniels, you know, who was mixed up in the Lotus Club scandal, that he was the local representative of an

international gang of white-slave traffickers who had affiliated offices in every part of the world, that he was not a man at all but an old boarding-house keeper who had very good reasons for assuming the male disguise, that he was a morphinomaniac, a disfrocked Baptist Minister, a pawnbroker out of work, a fire-worshipper, a Transylvanian, a bank clerk who had had a fall, a decayed jockey who disgraced himself at a subsequent period in connection with some East-End mission for reforming the boys of Bermondsey and then, after pawning his mother's jewelry, writing anonymous threatening letters to society ladies about their husbands and vice-versa, trying to blackmail three Cabinet Ministers and tricking poor servant-girls out of their hard-earned wages by the sale of sham Bibles, was luckily run to earth in Piccadilly Circus, after an exciting chase, with a forty-pound salmon under his arm which he had been seen to lift from the window of a Bondstreet fishmonger.

All these things, and a good many more, had been said. Eames knew it. Kind friends had seen to that.

To contrive such stories was a certain lady's method of asserting her personality on the island. She seldom went into society owing to some physical defect in her structure; she could only sit at home, like Penelope, weaving these and other bright tapestries—odds and ends of servants' gossip, patched together by the virulent industry of her own disordered imagination. It consoled Mr. Eames

slightly to reflect that he was not the only resident singled out for such aspersions; that the more harmless a man's life, the more fearsome the legends. He suffered, none the less. This was why he seldom entered the premises of the Alpha and Omega Club where, quite apart from his objection to Parker's poison and the loose and rowdy talk of the place, he was liable to encounter the lady's stepbrother. Of course he knew perfectly well what he ought to have done. He ought to have imitated the example of other people who behaved like scoundrels and openly gloried in it. That was the only way to be even with her; it took the wind out of her sails. Keith often put the matter into a nutshell:

"The practical advantages of doing something outrageous must be clear to you. It is the only way of stopping her mouth, unless you like to have her poisoned, which might be rather expensive even down here, though you may be sure I would do my best to smooth things over with Malipizzo. But I am afraid you don't realize the advantages of ruffianism as a mode of art and a mode of life. Only think: a thousand wrongs to every right! What an opening for a man of talent, especially in a country like this, where frank and independent action still counts its admirers. You have done nothing, of late, worthy to be recorded in the *chronique scandaleuse* of Nepenthe. Twelve years ago, wasn't it, that little affair of yours? Time is slipping by, and here you muddle along with your old Perrelli, in a fog of moral stagnation. It is not

fair to the rest of us. We all contribute our mites to the gaiety of nations. Bethink yourself. Bestir yourself. Man! Do something to show us you are alive."

To such speeches Mr. Eames would listen with a smile of amused indignation. He was incapable of living up to the ideals of a man like Keith whose sympathy with every form of wrong-doing would have rendered him positively unfit for decent society but for his flagrant good nature and good luncheons. He suffered in silence.

He had good reasons for suffering. That "little affair" of twelve years ago was a ghost which refused to be laid. Everyone on the island knew the story; it was handed down from one batch of visitors to the next. He knew that whenever his name was mentioned this unique indiscretion of his, this toothsome morsel, would likewise be dished up. It would never grow stale, though atoned for by twelve years of exemplary conduct. He felt guilty. There was a skeleton in his cupboard. He realized what people were saying.

"Know Eames? Oh, yes. That quiet man, who writes. One can't swallow half those yarns about him; quite impossible to believe, of course. She overdoes things, the good woman. All the same, there's no smoke without fire. You know what actually did happen, don't you? Well! one really doesn't quite know what to make of a fellow like that, does one?"

What had happened?

The bibliographer had fallen in love, after the fashion of a pure-minded, gallant gentleman. It was his first and only experience of this kind—an all-consuming passion which did much credit to his heart but little to his head. So deeply were his feelings involved that during those brief months of infatuation he neglected, he despised, he derided his idol Perrelli. He put on a new character. While the dust was accumulating on those piles of footnotes, Mr. Eames astonished people by becoming a society man. It was a transfiguration. He appeared in fancy ties and spats, fluttered about at boating parties and picnics, dined at restaurants, perpetrated one or two classic jokes about the sirocco. Nepenthe opened its eyes wide till the truth was made manifest. After that, everybody said he might have discovered a worthier object for his affection than the "ballon captif."

She was a native of the mainland to whose credit it must be said that she did not pretend to be anything but what she was—an exuberant, gluttonous dame, with volcanic eyes, heavy golden bracelets, the soupçon of a moustache, and arms as thick as other people's thighs: an altogether impossible person. Nobody but a man of genuine refinement, scrupulous rectitude, delicate sense of honour and kindly disposition would have risked being seen in the same street with such a horror; nobody but a real gentleman could have fallen in love with her. Mr. Eames ran after her like a dog. He made a perfect ass of himself, heedless of what anybody

thought or said of him. The men declared he was going mad—breaking up—sickening for an attack of G.P. "Miracles will never cease," charitably observed the Duchess. Alone of all his lady acquaintances, Madame Steynlin liked him all the better for this gaucherie. She was a true woman—friend of all lovers; she knew the human heart and its queer little vagaries. She received the couple with open arms and entertained them royally, after her manner; gave them a kind of social status. Under this friendly treatment Mr. Eames grew thinner from day to day; he was visibly losing flesh. The dame prospered. Piloted by the love-sick bibliographer she gradually waddled her way—it was uphill work, for both of them—into the uppermost strata of local society where, owing to the rarefied atmosphere, her appetite, to say nothing of her person, soon gained notoriety. She was known, in briefest space of time, as "the cormorant," as "prime streaky," as "Jumbo," as "the phenomenon" and, by those who understood the French language, as the "ballon captif."

The "ballon captif." . . .

How things got about, on Nepenthe! Somehow or other, this odious nickname reached her lover's ears. It embittered his existence to such an extent that, long after the idyll was over, he had serious thoughts of leaving the island, and would doubtless have done so, but for his re-kindled enthusiasm for Monsignor Perrelli. So sensitive did he remain on this point that the mere mention of balloons, or

even aeroplanes, would make him wince and feel desirous of leaving the room; he always thought that people introduced the subject with malicious purpose, in order to remind him of this unforgettable peccadillo, the "balloon business," his one lapse from perfect propriety. Mr. Keith, who confessed to a vein of coarseness in his nature—prided himself upon it and, in fact, cultivated insensitiveness as other people cultivate orchids, pronouncing it to be the best method of self-protection in a world infested with fools—Mr. Keith sometimes could not resist the temptation of raking up the ashes surreptitiously, after an elaborate, misleading preamble. He loved to watch his friend's meekly perplexed face on such occasions.

Heaven knows how long the affair might have lasted but for the fact that a husband, or somebody, unexpectedly turned up—a husky little man with a cast in one eye, who looked uxorious to an alarming degree. He carried her off in the nick of time to save Mr. Eames from social ostracism, mental dotage, and financial ruin. Her mere appearance had made him the laughing-stock of the place; her appetite had led him into outlays altogether incompatible with his income, chiefly in the matter of pastries, macaroons, fondants, ices, caramels, chocolates, jam tartlets and, above all, meringues, to which she was fabulously destructive.

It took some living down, that episode. He feared people would talk of it to his dying day; he knew they would! He wished balloons had never been

invented. None the less he stuck it out bravely, threw himself with redoubled zeal into Monsignor Perrelli and, incidentally, became more of a recluse than ever.

"It has been a lesson," he reflected. "*Semper aliquid hærebit,* I am afraid. . . ."

Ernest Eames was the ideal annotator. He was neither inductive nor deductive; he had no axe to grind. His talent consisted in an ant-like hiving faculty. He was acquisitive of information for a set purpose—to bring the *Antiquities* up to date. Whatever failed to fit in with this programme, however novel, however interesting—it was ruthlessly discarded. In this and other matters he was the reverse of Keith, who collected information for its own sake. Keith was a pertinacious and omnivorous student; he sought knowledge not for a set purpose but because nothing was without interest for him. He took all learning to his province. He read for the pleasure of knowing what he did not know before; his mind was unusually receptive because, he said, he respected the laws which governed his body. Facts were his prey. He threw himself into them with a kind of piratical ardour; took them by the throat, wallowed in them, worried them like a terrier, and finally assimilated them. They gave him food for what he liked best on earth: "disinterested thought." They "formed a rich loam." He had an encyclopædic turn of mind; his head, as somebody once remarked, was a lumber-room of useless information. He could tell you how many

public baths existed in Geneva in pre-Reformation days, what was the colour of Mehemet Ali's whiskers, why the manuscript of Virgil's friend Gallius had not been handed down to posterity, and in what year, and what month, the decimal system was introduced into Finland. Such aimless incursions into knowledge were a puzzle to his friends, but not to himself. They helped him to build up a harmonious scheme of life—to round himself off.

He had lately attacked, in Corsair fashion, the Greek philosophers, and had disembowelled Plato, Aristotle, and the rest of them, to his complete satisfaction, in a couple of months; at present he was up to the ears in psychology, and his talk bristled with phrases about the "function of the real," about reactions, reflexes, adjustments and stimuli. For all his complexity there was something so childlike in his nature that he never realized what an infliction he was, nor how tiresome his conversation could become to people who were not quite so avid of "disinterested thought." Living alone and spending too much time in unprofitable studies, his language was apt to be professionally devoid of humour—a defect he made heroic efforts to remedy by what he called the "Falernian system." It was the fault of his mother, he said; she was a painfully conscientious woman. A man's worst enemies are his parents, he would add.

So far as was known, Mr. Keith had never written a book, a pamphlet, or even a letter to the news-

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papers. He maintained a good deal of correspondence, however, in different parts of the world, and the wiser of those who were favoured with his epistles preserved them as literary curiosities, under lock and key, by reason of the writer's rare faculty of expressing the most atrocious things in correct and even admirable English. Chaster than snow as a conversationalist, he prostituted his mother-tongue, in letter-writing, to the vilest of uses. Friends of long standing called him an obscene old man. When taxed with this failing—by Mr. Eames, for instance, who shivered at what he called *prœtextata verba*—he would hint that he could afford to pay for his little whims, meaning, presumably, that a rich man is not to be judged by common standards of propriety. Such language was peculiarly galling to Mr. Eames who held that the possession of wealth entails not only privileges but obligations, and that the rich man should set the example of purity in words and deeds, etc. etc. etc.

They were always disagreeing, anyhow.

"You exalt purity to a bad eminence," Keith would remark. "What did you say about the book I lent you the other day? you said it was morbid and indecent; you said that no clean-minded person would care to read it. And yet, after an unnecessary amount of arguing, you were forced to admit that the subject was interesting and that the writer dealt with it in an interesting manner. What more can you expect from an author? Believe me, this hankering after purity, this hypersensitiveness as

to what is morbid or immoral, is by no means a good sign. A healthy man refuses to be hampered by preconceived notions of what is wrong or ugly. When he reads a book like that he either yawns or laughs. That is because he is sure of himself. I could give you a long list of celebrated statesmen, princes, philosophers and prelates of the Church who take pleasure, in their moments of relaxation, in what you would call improper conversation, literature or correspondence. They feel the strain of being continually pure; they realize that all strains are pernicious, and that there is no action without its reaction. They unbend. Only invertebrate folks do not unbend. They dare not, because they have no backbone. They know that if they once unbent, they could not straighten themselves out again. They make a virtue of their own organic defect. They explain their natural imperfection by calling themselves pure. If you had a little money——"

"You are always harking back to that point. What has money to do with it?"

"Poverty is like rain. It drops down ceaselessly, disintegrating the finer tissues of a man, his recent, delicate adjustments, and leaving nothing but the bleak and gaunt framework. A poor man is a wintry tree—alive, but stripped of its shining splendour. He is always denying himself this or that. One by one, his humane instincts, his elegant desires, are starved away by stress of circumstance. The charming diversity of life ceases to have any

meaning for him. To console himself, he sets up perverse canons of right and wrong. What the rich do, that is wrong. Why? Because he does not do it. Why not? Because he has no money. A poor man is forced into a hypocritical attitude towards life—debarred from being intellectually honest. He cannot pay for the necessary experience."

"There is something in what you say," Eames would assent. "But I fear you are overstating your case."

"So did Demosthenes and Jesus Christ, and likewise Cicero and Julius Cæsar. Everybody overstates his case, particularly when he is anxious to do something which he considers useful. I regard it as a real grievance, Eames, not to be allowed to assist you financially. Having never done a stroke of work in my life, I can talk freely about my money. My grandfather was a pirate and slave-dealer. To my certain knowledge, not a penny of his wealth was honestly come by. That ought to allay your scruples about accepting it. *Non olet,* you know. Let me write you out a cheque for five hundred, there's a good fellow. Solely as a means of smoothing over the anfractuosities of life and squeezing all the possible pleasures out of it! What else is money made for? They say you live on milk and salad. Why the Hell——"

"Thanks! I have all I want; sufficient to pay for the minor pleasures of life."

"Such as?"

"A clean handkerchief now and then. I see no

harm in dying poor."

"Where would I be, if my grandfather had seen no harm in it? Don't you really believe that money sweetens all things, as Pepys says?"

The diarist was one of Keith's favourite authors. He called him a representative Englishman and regretted that the type was becoming extinct. Eames would reply:

"Your Pepys was a disgusting climber. He makes me ill with his snobbishness and silver plate and monthly gloatings over his gains. I wonder you can read the man. He may have been a capable official, but he was not a gentleman."

"Have you ever seen a gentleman, except on a tailor's fashion plate?"

"Yes. One, at all events; my father. However, we won't labour that point; we have discussed it before, haven't we? Your money would sweeten nothing for me. It would procure me neither health of body nor peace of mind. Thanks all the same."

Mr. Keith, true to his ancestral tenacity, was not easily put off. He would begin again:

"George Gissing was a scholar and a man of refinement, like yourself. You know what he says? 'Put money in thy purse, for to lack the current coin of the realm is to lack the privileges of humanity.' The privileges of humanity: you understand, Eames?"

"Does he say that? Well, I am not surprised. I have sometimes noticed gross, unhealthy streaks in Gissing."

"I will tell you what is unhealthy, Eames. Your own state of mind. You derive a morbid pleasure from denying yourself the common emoluments of life. It's a form of self-indulgence. I wish you would open your windows and let the sun in. You are living by candlelight. If you analysed yourself closely——"

"I don't analyse myself closely. I call it a mistake. I try to see soberly. I try to think logically. I try to live becomingly."

"I am glad you don't always succeed," Keith would reply, with a horrible accent on the word "always." "Heaven shield me from a clean-minded man!"

"We have touched on that subject once or twice already, have we not? Your arguments will never entangle me, though I think I can be fair to them. Money enables you to multiply your sensations—to travel about, and so forth. In doing so, you multiply your personality, as it were; you lengthen your days, figuratively speaking; you come in contact with more diversified aspects of life than a person of my limited means can afford to do. The body, you say, is a subtle instrument to be played upon in every variety of manner and rendered above all things as sensitive as possible to pleasurable impressions. In fact, you want to be a kind of Æolian harp. I admit that this is more than a string of sophisms; you may call it a philosophy of life. But it is not my philosophy. It does not appeal to me in the least. You will get no satisfaction out of

me, Keith, with your hedonism. You are up against a brick wall. You speak of my deliberately closing up avenues of pleasure. They ought to be closed up, I say, if a man is to respect himself. I do not call my body a subtle instrument; I call it a damned nuisance. I don't want to be an Æolian harp. I don't want my sensations multiplied; I don't want my personality extended; I don't want my outlook widened; I don't want money; I don't want aspects of life. I'm positive, I'm literal. I know exactly what I want. I want to concern myself with what lies under my hand. I want to be allowed to get on with my work. I want to bring old Perrelli up to date."

"My dear fellow! We all love you for that. And I am delighted to think you are not really clean-minded, in spite of all these lofty protestations. Because you aren't, are you?"

If, after such discourse, the bibliographer still remained mulishly clean-minded, Keith would return to the psychological necessity of "appropriate reaction" and cite an endless list of sovereigns, popes, and other heroes who, in their moments of leisure, were wise enough to react against the persistent strain of purity. Then, via Alexander of Macedon, "one of the greatest sons of earth," as Bishop Thirlwall had called him—Alexander, with whose deplorable capacity for "unbending" a scholar like Eames was perfectly familiar—he would switch the conversation into realms of military science, and begin to expatiate upon the wonderful

advance which has been made since those days in the arts of defensive and offensive warfare—the decline of the phalanx, the rise of artillery, the changed system of fortifications, those modern inventions in the department of land defences, sea defences and, above all, aerial defences, parachutes, hydroplanes. . . .

Whereupon a curious change would creep over the bibliographer's honest face. He knew what this talk portended. His features would assume an air of strained but polite attention, and he generally broke off the conversation and took his departure at the earliest moment consistent with ordinary civility. On such occasions he was wont to think his friend Keith an offensive cad. Sadly shaking his head, he would say to himself:

"*Nihil quod tetigit non inquinavit.*"

Chapter XIII

Mr. Keith was apt to be a bore, but he could do things properly when he wanted, as for example on the occasion of his annual bean-feast. There were no two opinions about that. The trees, arbours, and winding ways of his garden were festooned that evening with hundreds of Chinese lamps whose multi-coloured light mingled pleasingly with the purer radiance of the moon, shining directly overhead. It was like fairyland, the Duchess was wont to declare, year after year. And Don Francesco who, on this particular night, clung closely to her skirts in view of that impending conversion to the Roman Church, replied laughingly:

"If fairyland is anything like this, I would not object to living there. Provided always, dear lady, that you are to be found somewhere on the premises. What do you say, Mr. Heard?"

"I will gladly join your party, if you will allow me," replied the bishop. "This aspic could not be

better. It seems to open up a new world of delights. Dear me. I fear I am becoming a gourmand, like Lucullus. Though Lucullus, to be sure, was a temperate man. No, thank you, Don Francesco; not a drop more! My liver, you know. I declare it's making me feel quite dizzy."

As Marten had foretold, the wine flowed in torrents. There was a bewildering display of cold dishes, too, prepared under the personal supervision of the chef—that celebrated artist whom Keith had inveigled out of the service of a life-loving old Ambassador by the threat of disclosing to the police some hideously disreputable action in the man's past life which His Excellency had artlessly confided to him, under the seal of secrecy.

Mr. Samuel, a commercial gentleman who had got stuck somehow or other at the Alpha and Omega Club, cast a practised eye over the wines, chaud-froids, fruits, salads, ices, the lanterns and other joys of the evening and announced, after a rough computation, that Keith's outlay for that little show must have run well into three figures. Mr. White agreed, adding that it did one good to get a mouthful of drinkable fizz after Parker's poison.

"Ah, but you ought to try the punch."

"Come on then," said White.

They moved away and soon stumbled upon a cluster of bibulous mortals in their element. Miss Wilberforce was there. She liked to linger near the fountain-head; the fountain-head, on this occasion, being a cyclopean bowl of iced punch. The lady

was in grand condition; festive, playful, positively flirtatious. She nibbled, between her libations, at a savoury biscuit (she hated solid food, as a rule) in order, she said, to staunch her thirst; she told everybody that it was her birthday. Yes, her birthday! In fact, she was quite a different creature from the bashful visitor at the Duchess's entertainment; she was hardly shy at all.

"Punch and moonlight!" she was saying. "It's all as right as rain—birthday or no birthday."

Miss Wilberforce had about forty birthdays in the year, each of them due to be worthily celebrated like this one.

It was a sad and a scandalous business. Better things might have been expected of her. She was so obviously a lady. She had been so nicely brought up. While there was still an English Church on the island, she never failed to attend Divine Service, despite her Sunday headache. She was often the only member of the congregation—she and Mr. Freddy Parker, whose official dignity and English origin, however questionable his Christianity, constrained him to put in an appearance. Mortal enemies, they used to sit on opposite pews, glaring across the vacant building to see if they could catch each other asleep, responding at irregular intervals out of sheer cussedness, and trying vainly to feel more charitable during those moments when the scraggy young curate—generally some social failure who raked together a few pounds from these hazardous continental engagements—recited the

Gospel according to Saint John. Those days were over. She was definitely on the downward grade. Three members of the Club and two Russian apostles were even then engaged in tossing up who should have the privilege of seeing her home. The lot fell to Mr. Richards, the excellent Vice-President, an elderly gentleman whose carefully parted hair and flowing beard made him the very picture of respectability. To look at him, one would have said that the dear lady could not be in better hands.

Mr. Keith was a perfect host. He had the right word for everybody; his infectious conviviality made them all straightway at their ease. The overdressed native ladies, the priests and officials moving about in prim little circles, were charmed with his affable manner "so different from most Englishmen"; likewise that flock of gleeful tourists who had suddenly turned up, craving for admission without a single letter of introduction between them, and were forthwith welcomed on the strength of the fact that one of their party had been to Easter Island. Even the *parroco* could not help laughing as Keith, with irresistible good nature, seized him by the arm and thrust a *marron glacé* between his lips. An ideal host! The "Falernian system" was in abeyance that day. It was the one evening in the year when, in the interests of his guests, he could be relied upon to remain absolutely sober to the last moment; a state of affairs which doubtless had its drawbacks, seeing that it made him, in longer conversational efforts, rather more abstruse and unintelligible than

usual—"blind sober," as Don Francesco once said. Even sobriety was forgiven him. He took the precaution, of course, to keep the house locked and to replace his ordinary services of plate by Elkington; people being pardonably fond of carrying away momentoes of so enjoyable an evening. Bottles, plates, and glasses were smashed by the dozen. He liked to see them smashed. It proved that everybody was having a good time.

A person unacquainted with Keith's nature could never have guessed what a sacrifice this entertainment was to him. He was an egoist, a solitary, in his pleasures; he used to contend that no garden on earth, however spacious, was large enough for more than one man. And this little Nepenthe domain, though he saw it for only a few weeks in the year, was the apple of his eye. He guarded it jealously, troubled at the thought that its chaste recesses might be profaned, if but for one day, by the presence of a motley assemblage of nonentities. But a man of his income is expected to do something to amuse his fellow-creatures. One owes certain duties to society. Hence this gathering, which had become a regular feature in the spring calendar of the island. Having once decided on the step, he did not propose to be bound by conventionalities which were the poison of rational human intercourse. Unlike the Duchess and Mr. Parker, he refused to draw the line at Russians; the Club, too, was represented by some of its most characteristic members. He often descanted on the social intoler-

ance of men, their lack of graciousness and generous instincts; he would have made room for the devil himself—at all events in his "outer circle." Such being the case, it stands to reason that he did not draw the line at freethinkers. It was sometimes rather hard to know where he did draw the line.

The red-haired judge, with straw hat and Mephistophelean limp, was there, looking like an Offenbach villain out for a spree. After being effusively greeted by the host—they understood one another perfectly—and forced to eat a quantity of some pink-looking stuff which he could not resist although knowing it would disagree with him, His Worship, left to his own devices, hobbled along in pursuit of his new friend Muhlen. He found him, and was soon relating succulent anecdotes of his summer holidays—anecdotes, all about women, which Muhlen tried to cap with experiences of his own. The judge always went to the same place—Salsomaggiore, a thermal station whose waters were good for his sore legs. He described to Muhlen how, in jaunty clothes and shining shoes he pottered about its trim gardens, ogling the ladies who always ogled back; it was the best fun in the world, and sometimes——! Mr. Malipizzo, for all his incredible repulsiveness, posed as an ardent and successful lover of women. No doubt it cost money. But he was never at a loss for that commodity; he had other sources of revenue, he hinted, beside his wretched official salary.

Wandering along arm in arm, they passed vari-

ous contingents of the Russians, male and female, whose scarlet blouses shone brightly under the variegated globes of light. These exotics were happy as children, full of fun and laughter; none more so than the young giant Krasnojabkin, whose name had been coupled by scandal-mongers with that of Madame Steynlin. An admiring audience had gathered around him while he performed a frenzied cancan in an open moonlit space; he always danced when he had enough to drink. The judge looked on with envy. It sickened him to realize that those far-famed luncheons and dinners of Madame Steynlin were being devoured by a savage like this. And the money he doubtless extracted from her! Presently a loud guffaw from some bosky thicket announced that the friends had been joined by the Financial Commissioner for Nicaragua. The Trinity was complete. They were always together, those three, playing cards at the Club or sipping lemonade and vermouth on the terrace.

"Oh, Mr. Keith," said the Duchess in her sweetest accents, "do you know what this entertainment makes me think?"

"Shall I guess?"

"Nothing of the kind! It makes me think that it is very, very wrong of a man like you to be a bachelor. You want a wife."

"To want a wife, Duchess, is better than to need one. Especially if it happens to be only your neighbour's."

"I am sure that means something dreadful!"

Don Francesco broke in:

"Tell me, Keith, how about your wives? What have you done with them? Is it true that you sold them at various Oriental ports?"

"They got mislaid, somehow. All that was before my Great Renunciation."

"Is it true that you kept them locked up in different parts of London?"

"I made it a rule never to introduce my lady-friends to one another. They are so fond of comparing notes. Novelists try to make us believe that women delight in men's society. Rubbish! They prefer that of their own sex. But please don't refer to the most painful period of my life."

The priest insisted:

"Is it true that you gave the plumpest of them to the Sultan of Colambang in exchange for the recipe of some wonderful sauce? Is it true that you used to be known as the Lightning Lover? Is it true that you used to say, in your London days, that no season was complete without a ruined home?"

"She exaggerates a good deal, that lady."

"Is it true that you once got so drunk that you mistook one of those red-coated Chelsea pensioners for a pillar-box and tried to post a letter in his stomach?"

"I'm very short-sighted, Don Francesco. Besides, all that was in a previous incarnation. Do come and listen to the music! May I offer you my arm, Duchess? I have a surprise for you."

"You have a surprise for us every year, you bad

man," she said. "Now do try and see if you can't get married. It makes one feel so good."

Keith had a peculiar habit of vanishing for a day or two to the mainland, and returning with some rare orchid from the hills, a piece of Greek statuary, a new gardener, or something. Sowing his wild oats, he called it. During this last visit he had come across the tracks of an almost extinct tribe of gipsies that roamed up and down the glens of those mysterious mountains whose purple summits were visible, on clear days, from his own windows. After complex and costly negotiations they had allowed themselves to be embarked, for this one night only, in a capacious sailing boat to Nepenthe, in order to pleasure Mr. Keith's guests. And here they sat, huddled together in dignified repose and abashed, as it seemed, by the strangeness of their surroundings; a bizarre group stained to an almost negro tint by exposure to sun and winds and rain.

Here they sat—gnarled old men and sinewy fathers of families, with streaming black hair, golden earrings, hooded cloaks of wool and sandals bound with leathern thongs. Mothers were there, shapeless bundles of rags, nursing infants at the breast. The girls were draped in gaudy hues, and ablaze with metal charms and ornaments on forehead and arms and ankles. They showed their flashing teeth and smiled from time to time in frank wonder, whereas the boys, superbly savage, like young panthers caught in a trap, kept their eyes downcast or threw distrustful, defiant glances

round them. Here they sat in silence, smoking tobacco and taking deep draughts out of a pitcher of milk which was handed round from one to the other. Occasionally the older people would pick up their instruments—bagpipes of sheepskins, small drums and gourd-like mandolines—and draw from them strange dronings, gurglings, thrummings, twangings; soon a group of youngsters would rise gravely from the ground and, without any preconcerted signal, begin to move in a dance—a formal and intricate measure, such as had never yet been witnessed on Nepenthe.

Something inhuman and yet troublingly personal lay in the performance; it invaded the onlookers with a sense of disquietude. There was primeval ecstasy in those strains and gestures. Giant moths, meanwhile, fluttered overhead, rattling their frail wings against the framework of the paper lanterns; the south wind passed through the garden like the breath of a friend, bearing the aromatic burden of a thousand night-blooming shrubs and flowers. Young people, meeting here, would greet one another shyly, with unfamiliar ceremoniousness, and then, after listening awhile to the music and exchanging a few awkward phrases, wander away as if by common consent—further away from this crowd and garish brilliance, far away, into some fragrant dell, where the light was dim.

"What do you make of it?" asked Keith of Madame Steynlin, who was listening intently. "Is this music? If so, I begin to understand its laws. They

are physical. I seem to feel the effect of it in the lower part of my chest. Perhaps that is the region which musical people call their ear. Tell me, Madame Steynlin, what is music?"

"That's a puzzle," said the bishop greatly interested.

"How can I explain it to you? It is so complicated, and you have so many guests this evening. You are coming to my picnic after the festival of Saint Eulalia? Yes? Well, I will try to explain it then"—and her eye turned, with a kind of maternal solicitude, down the pathway to where, in that patch of bright moonshine, her young friend Krasnojabkin, gloriously indifferent to gipsies and everything else, was astounding people by the audacity of his terpsichorean antics.

"Let that be a promise," Keith replied. "Ah, Count Caloveglia! How good of you to come. I would not have asked you to such a worldly function had I not thought that this dancing might interest you."

"It does, it does!" said the old aristocrat, thoughtfully sipping champagne out of an enormous goblet which he carried in his hand. "It makes me dream of that East which it has never been my fortune, alas, to behold. What a flawless group! There is something archaic, Oriental, in their attitudes; they seem to be fraught with all the mystery, the sadness, of life that is past—of things remote from ourselves."

"My gipsies," said Keith, "are not everybody's gipsies."

"I think they despise us! And this austere regularity in the steps of the dancers, this vibrating accompaniment that dwells persistently on one note —how primitive, how scornfully unintellectual! It is like a passionate lover knocking to gain an entrance into our hearts. And he succeeds. He breaks down the barrier by the oldest and best of lovers' expedients—sheer reiteration of monotony. A lover who reasons is no lover."

"How true that is," remarked Madame Steynlin.

"Sheer monotony," repeated the Count. "And it is the same with their pictorial art. We blame the Orientals for their chill cult of geometrical designs, their purely stylistic decoration, their endless repetitions, as opposed to our variety and love of floral, human, or other naturalistic motives. But by this simple means they attain their end—a direct appeal. Their art, like their music, goes straight to the senses; it is not deflected or disturbed by any intervening medium. Colour plays its part; the sombre, throbbing sounds of these instruments—the glowing tints of their carpets and tapestries. Talking of gipsies, do you know whether our friend van Koppen has arrived?"

"Koppen? A very up-to-date nomad, who takes the whole world for his camping-ground. No, not yet. But he'll turn up in a day or two."

Count Caloveglia was concerned, just then, about Mr. van Koppen. He had a little business to transact with him—he fervently hoped that the millionaire would not forgo his annual visit to Nepenthe.

"I shall be glad to meet him again," he remarked carelessly. Then looking up he saw Denis, who moved under the trees alone. Observing that he seemed rather disconsolate, he walked up to him and said in a fatherly tone: "Will you confer a favour, Mr. Denis, on an old man who lives much alone? Will you come and see me as you promised? My daughter is away just now and will not be back till midsummer. I wish you could have met her. Meanwhile, I am a little solitary. I have also a few antiquities that might interest you."

While Denis, slightly embarrassed, was uttering some appropriate words, the bishop suddenly asked:

"Where is Mrs. Meadows? Wasn't she coming down tonight?"

"Of course she was," said Keith. "Isn't she here? What can this mean? Your cousin is a particular friend of mine, Heard, though I have not seen her for the last six days or so. Something must be wrong. That baby, I expect."

"I missed her once already," said Heard. "I'll write and make an appointment, or go up again. By the way, Count—you remember our conversation? Well, I have thought of an insuperable objection to your Mediterranean theory. The sirocco. You will never change the sirocco. The Elect of the Earth will never endure it all their lives."

"I think we can change the sirocco," replied the Count, meditatively. "We can tame it, at all events. I do not know much about its history; you must ask Mr. Eames——"

"Who is at home," interrupted Keith, "closeted with his Perrelli."

"What has been, may be," continued the old man, oracularly. "I question whether the sirocco was as obnoxious in olden days as now, otherwise the ancients, who had absurdly sensitive skins, would have complained of it more frequently. The deforestation of Northern Africa, I suspect, has much to do with it. Frenchmen are now trying to revive those prosperous conditions which Mohammedanism has destroyed. Oh, yes! I don't despair of muzzling the sirocco, even as we are muzzling that other Mediterranean pest, the malaria."

Keith observed:

"Petronius, I remember, speaks of the north wind being the mistress of the Tyrrhenian. He would not use such language nowadays, unless alluding to its violence rather than its prevalence. Once I thought of translating Petronius. But I discovered certain passages in the book which are almost improper. I don't think the public ought to be put into possession of such stuff. I am rather sorry; I like Petronius—the poetical fragments, I mean; they make me regret that I was not born under the Roman Empire. People are leaving," he added. "I have said good-bye to about fifty. I shall be able to get a drink soon."

"So you were born out of time and out of place, like many of us," laughed the bishop.

Count Caloveglia said:

"It is an academic problem, and therefore a

problem which does not exist for me, and therefore, Keith, a problem dear to your own metaphysical heart, to enquire whether a man is ever born at an inopportune moment. We use the phrase. If we took thought we would discard it. For what is the truth of the matter? The truth is that a man, of whom we say this, is born at exactly the right moment; that those with whose customs and aspirations he seems to be in discord have urgent need of him at that particular time. No great man is ever born too soon or too late. When we say that the time is not ripe for this or that celebrity, we confess by implication that this very man, and no other, is required. Was Giordano Bruno, or Edgar Poe, born out of time? Surely no generation needed them more imperiously than their own. Only fools are born out of time. And yet—no; not even they. For where should we be without them?"

He smiled suavely, as though some pleasant thought was passing through his mind.

"At any rate a good many people die too soon or too late," said Mr. Edgar Marten who, after doing full justice to the food and drinks, had suddenly appeared on the scene. "Often too late," he added.

Keith, despite his professions of sanity and reason, had an inexplicable, invincible horror of death; he quailed at the mere mention of the black phantom. The subject being not at all to his taste, he promptly remarked:

"The scholar Grosseteste was unquestionably born too soon. And I know one man who is born

too late. Who? Yourself, Count. You were made for the Periclean epoch."

"Thank you," said that gentleman with a gracious wave of his hand. "But forgive me for disagreeing with you. Had I lived in that age, I should be lacking in reverence for what it accomplished. I should be too near to its life; unable, as you say, to see the forest for the trees. I should be like Thucydides, a most sensible person who, if I recollect aright, barely mentions Ictinus and the rest of them. How came it about? This admirable writer imagined they were building a temple for Greece; he lacked the interval of centuries which has allowed mankind to see their work in its true perspective. He possessed traditional moral standards whereby to judge the actions of historical contemporaries; he could praise or blame his politicians with a good conscience. For the Parthenon creators he had no sure norm. The standards were not yet evolved. Pheidias was a talented fellow-citizen—a hewer in stone by profession: what could he know of the relations of Pheidias to posterity? Great things can only be seen at a proper distance. Pheidias, to him, may have been little more than an amateur, struggling with brute material in the infancy of his trade or calling. No, my friend! I am glad not to be coeval with Pericles. I am glad to recognize Hellenic achievements at their true worth. I am glad to profit by that wedge of time which has enabled me to reverence things fair and eternal."

"Things fair and eternal," echoed Keith who

was getting too thirsty and restless to discuss art-matters. "Come with me! I will show you things fair and eternal."

He led the way to a distant arbour, overhung with a canopy of blood-red passion-flowers and girt about by their crimson blossoms. A lighted lantern of grotesque design dangled from the clustering foliage in its roof. Within, directly under the beams, all by itself, on an upright chair beside a small table, sat an incongruous, startling, awe-inspiring apparition—a grimy old man of Mongolian aspect. He might have been frozen to stone; so immobile, so lifeless were his features. Belated visitors passed near the entrance of the shrine, peered within as at some outlandish and sinister freak of nature, and moved on with jocular words. Nobody ventured to overstep the threshold, whether from religious fear or because of something repellent, something almost putrescent, which radiated from his person. A contingent of Little White Cows, a kind of body-guard, stood at a respectful distance beyond, intent upon his every movement. The Master never stirred. He sat there to be looked at—accustomed to homage almost divine; beatifically inane. Like the Christians of old, he wore no hat. The head was nearly bald. A long cloak, glistening with grease stains, swathed his limbs and portly belly, on which one suspected multitudinous wrinkles of fat. Two filmy lidless eyes, bulging on a level with his forehead, stared into vacuity; his snub nose grew out of a flattened face whose pallor was accentu-

ated by the reflection of the glittering leaves—it looked faded and sodden, like blotting-paper that has been left out all night in the rain. Sporadic greenish-grey hairs were scattered about his chin. The mouth was agape.

On Mr. Keith's appearance he made no sign of recognition. Presently, however, his lips seemed to get out of control. They moved; they began to chatter and to mumble, in childish fashion, the inarticulate yearnings of eld. Keith said, as though displaying some museum curiosity:

"Mine is the only house on Nepenthe which the Master still deigns to enter. I'm afraid he has grown very groggy on his pins of late; if he sat on any but a straight-backed chair they would never get him up again. To think that was once a pretty little boy . . . Poor old fellow! I know what he wants. They've been neglecting him, those young idiots."

He departed, and soon returned with a tumbler full of raw whisky which he placed on the table within reach of the arm. A flaccid, unwholesome-looking hand was raised slowly, in a kind of deprecatory gesture; then allowed to fall again upon the belly where it lay, with the five fingers, round and chalky-white, extended like the rays of a starfish. Nothing more happened.

"We must go away for a while," said Keith, "or else he won't touch it. He does not object to alcohol, you know. Whisky has not come out of a warm-blooded beast. But it's going into one. A

kind of Asiatic Socrates, don't you think?"

"A Buddha," suggested the Count. "A Buddha in second-rate alabaster. A Chinese Buddha of a bad, realistic period."

"It's odd," remarked Mr. Heard. "He reminds me of a dead fish. Something ancient and fishlike —it's that mouth——"

"He's a beauty!" interrupted Edgar Marten, sniffing with disgust. "Eyes like a boiled haddock. And that thing has the cheek to call itself a Messiah. Thank God I'm a Jew; it's no business of mine. But if I were a Christian, I'd bash his blooming head in. Damned if I wouldn't. The frowsy, fetid, fly-blown fraud. Or what's the matter with the Dog's Home?"

"Come, come," said Mr. Heard, who had taken rather a liking to this violent youngster and was feeling more than usually indulgent that evening. "Come! He can't help his face, I fancy. Have you no room in your heart for an original? And don't you think—quite apart from questions of religion —that we tourists ought to be grateful to these people for diversifying the landscape with their picturesque red blouses and things?"

"I have no eye for landscape, Mr. Heard, save in so far as it indicates strata and faults and other geological points. The picturesque don't interest me. I am full of Old Testamentary strains; I can't help looking at men from the ethical point of view. And what have people's clothes to do with their religion? He can't help his face, you say. Well,

if he can't help that greasy old mackintosh, I'll eat my hat. Can't a fellow be a Messiah without sporting a pink shirt or fancy dressing-gown or blue pyjamas or something? But there you are! I defy you to name me a single-barrelled crank. If a man is a religious lunatic, or a vegetarian, he is sure to be touched in some other department as well; he will be an antivivisectionist, a nutfooder, costume-maniac, stamp-collector, or a spiritualist into the bargain. Haven't you ever noticed that? And isn't he dirty? Where is the connection between piety and dirt? I suggest they are both relapses into ancestral channels and the one drags the other along with it. When I see a thing like this, I want to hew it in pieces. Agag, Mr. Heard; Agag. I must have another look at this specimen; one does not see such a sight every day. He is a living fossil—post-pleistocene."

He drew off; Keith and the Count, engaged in some deep conversation, had also moved a few paces away.

Mr. Heard stood alone, his back turned to the Master. Moonlight still flooded the earth, the lanterns were flickering and sputtering. Some had gone out, leaving gaps of darkness in the lighted walks. Many of the guests retired without bidding farewell to their host; he liked them to feel at their ease, to take "French leave" whenever so disposed—to depart "à l'anglaise," as the French say. The garden was nearly empty. A great quietude had fallen upon its paths and thickets. From afar

resounded the boisterous chorus of a party of revellers loth to quit the scene; it was suddenly broken by a terrific crash and bursts of laughter. Some table had been knocked over.

Standing there, the bishop could not but listen to Keith, who had raised his voice in emphasis and was saying to the Count, in his best Keithean manner:

"I am just coming to that point. A spring-board is what humanity needs. What better one can be contrived than this pure, unadulterated Byzantinism? Cretinism, I call it. Look at the Orthodox Church. A repository of apocalyptic nonsense such as no sane man can take seriously. Nonsense of the right kind, the uncompromising kind. That is my point. The paralysing, sterilizing cult of these people offers a far better spring-board into a clean element of thought than our English Church, whose *demi-vierge* concessions to common sense afford seductive resting-places to the intellectually weak-kneed. Do I make myself clear? I'm getting infernally thirsty."

"I quite agree with you, my friend. The Russians have got a better spring-board than the English. The queer thing is, that the Russian won't jump, whereas the Englishman often does. Well, well! We cannot live without fools."

Mr. Heard was slightly perturbed by these words. A good fellow like Keith! "*Demi-vierge* concessions to common sense": what did he mean by that? Did his church really make such concessions?

"I'll think about it to-morrow," he decided.

The Master, when they returned to him, had not budged from his resting-place. The fingers still lay, starfish-wise, upon the folds of that soiled home-spun; his eyes still stared out of the leafy bower; his face still wore its mask of placid imbecility.

The glass was empty.

Slowly, as on a pivot, his head turned in the direction of the bodyguard.

Forthwith some favourite disciple—not Krasnojabkin, who happened to be escorting Madame Steynlin to her villa just then—darted to his side; with the help of two lady-apostles known, respectively, as the "goldfinch" and the "red apple," they conveyed him out of that shelter into the deserted, moonlit garden. He leaned heavily on the arm of the youth; peevish sounds, quasi-human, proceeded from his colourless lips. And now he was almost speaking; desirous, it seemed, of formulating some truth too deep for human utterance.

"I bet I know what he is saying," whispered Keith. "It's something about the Man-God."

Chapter XIV

The Russian Government is notoriously tender-hearted. But even the worm will turn. . . .

Scholars who have treated of the life of the ex-monk Bazhakuloff divide it into five clearly marked periods: the probationary, dialectical, political, illumined, and expiatory.

The first began in youth when, being driven from his father's house by reason of his vagrant habits and other incorrigible vices, he entered a monastery near Kasan. Despite occasional lapses prompted by the hot blood of his years and punished with harsh disciplinary measures, he seems to have performed his monkish duties with sufficient zeal. It was observed, however, that with increasing years he became unduly interested in questions of dogma. He talked too freely; he was always arguing. Being unable to read or write, he developed an astonishing memory for things he had heard and faces he had seen; he brought them up at inconvenient

moments. He grew factious, obstreperous, declaring that there was much in the constitution of the Holy Russian Church which ought to be amended and brought up to date. What people wanted, he said, was a New Jerusalem. A violent altercation with his Superior touching the attributes of the Holy Ghost ended in a broken jaw-bone on the part of the older man, and the expulsion of the younger. The dialectical period had set in. The convent inmates, on the whole, were glad to see the last of him—particularly the Father Superior.

We next find him living in a large barn about fifteen miles from Moscow. The Superior being unwilling to publish the true facts of the broken jaw-bone, a certain fame, the fame of an earnest but misunderstood religious innovator, had preceded him. Adherents, barely twenty at first, gathered to his side. These disciples, humble analphabetics like himself, have left us no record of what passed at those long discussions. Certain it is that he now began to formulate the rules of his Revised Church. They were to live on charity, to go bareheaded, and to wear red blouses—like the Christians of old. The charm of these simple regulations spread abroad, and gained him fresh recruits. There were now some cultured folk among them, who collected his sayings into the *Golden Book*. He decided to limit his disciples to the "Sacred Number 63," and to call them "Little White Cows." Asked why he chose this title, he answered that cows were pure and useful animals without which humanity could

not live; even so were his disciples. The innate good sense of this speech increased his reputation. About this time, too, he would sometimes prophesy, and undergo long periods of motionless self-abstraction. At the end of one of these latter, after tasting no food or drink for three and a half hours, he gave utterance to what was afterwards known as the First Revelation. It ran to this effect: "The Man-God is the Man-God, and not the God-Man." Asked how he arrived at so stupendous an aphorism, he answered that it just came to him. There were troubles in the neighbourhood over the audacity of this utterance; some called it a divine inspiration, to the majority it was known as the Unnamable Heresy. For a brief while the town was formed into two camps, and the Chief of Police, a prudent official, was at his wit's end what to do with these inflammable elements, seeing that the ex-monk's followers had now swelled to several hundreds and contained not a few of the more influential aristocrats of the city. In this dilemma, he applied for instruction to the Procurator of the Holy Synod. That gentleman, having considered the case, rashly decided that a visionary of this stamp might be useful for furthering certain projects of his own. He hoped, by placing him under an obligation, to fashion out of the young reformer an amenable instrument—a miscalculation which he lived (though not for long) to repent. Under the Procurator's ægis, Bazhakuloff was summoned to the Capitol. The political period was beginning. Mos-

cow, on the whole, was glad to see the last of him —particularly the Chief of Police.

There began the most brilliant epoch of his life. By steps which it is needless to trace, he fought and wormed his way into the favour of the Court. A good deal of his worldly success may well have been due, as his enemies assert, to an incredible mixture of cringing, astuteness, and impudence. It stands to reason, however, that a man of this type must have possessed sterling qualities of his own to be found occupying—all this was years and years ago —a suite of apartments in the Palace, where he lived in splendour, a Power behind the Throne, the Confidential Adviser of the Highest Circles. His monkish garb was soon encrusted with orders and decorations, no state function was complete without his presence, no official appointment, from the highest to the lowest sphere of government, was held to be valid without his sanction. Red blouses, one of several keys to his favour, could be counted by thousands. He crushed opposition with an iron hand. He wrought a miracle or two; but what chiefly accounted for the almost divine veneration in which he was held was a succession of lucky prophecies—none luckier than wherein, during one of his moments of inspired self-abstraction, he foretold the early and violent death of his former protector, the man to whom he owed this rise to the pinnacles of fame. For even so it fell out. Not many days later the Procurator of the Holy Synod was found murdered in bed by an unknown hand.

A certain journalist, writing from Switzerland, boldly states that the Procurator was murdered at the instigation of Bazhakuloff and claims to have heard, from an eye-witness whom he does not name, of a bitter quarrel between the two on the subject of a certain lady as to whose identity we are also left in doubt. It may be true; such things have happened ere now. This particular writer's credibility, however, is none of the best; he has been convicted over and over again of forcing the note in his diatribes against what he calls "retrogression into idolatry." There was certainly a good deal of unrest in the country during the period of the ex-monk's ascendency; no less than 13,783 persons had been banished to Siberia, and 3756 executed at his orders. Yet nothing, it seemed, could shatter his position when, with appalling suddenness, a thunderbolt descended. Nobody knows to this day what took place. It was something Russian; some scandal in the Highest Spheres which may see the light of day, centuries hence, when the Imperial Archives are disclosed as musty court history to the eyes of students curious in such matters. At this crisis, when 44,323 persons, mostly liberals, were awaiting trial in the prisons of the capital, the ex-monk would doubtless have been quietly removed after the fashion of court favourites, had not his adherents, now numbering many hundred thousands, threatened a revolution. A secret compromise was effected. He was banished, with every outward mark of disgrace, to a monastery in the

remote and inhospitable region of Viatka, there to meditate upon the instability of human affairs. The illumined period was drawing nigh. The Capital, on the whole, was glad to see the last of him—particularly the prisoners awaiting trial.

The diet and discipline nearly killed him at first. He was consoled by knowing that his fame had spread far and wide. The Court being unwilling to publish the true facts of his disgrace, he was regarded as a martyr, a victim of political intrigue, an injured saint. Disciples multiplied. The *Golden Book* was filled with priceless sayings—wise and salutary maxims which echoed from end to end of the country. The New Jerusalem took on a definite shape; the nucleus of the movement, the initiated among his followers, were retained as the "Sacred 63"; he called them his apostles and himself their Messiah, which some people thought rather presumptuous of him. His reputation for sanctity became such that he was once more a power to be reckoned with; the Court, in fact, was on the verge of receiving him into favour again, when the Second Revelation was announced. It ran to this effect: Flesh and blood of warm-blooded beasts is Abomination to Little White Cows. Asked how he contrived to formulate so novel and tremendous a proposition, he answered that it just came to him. His followers—there were about three million of them now—instantly refused to touch the Unclean Thing, and all would have gone well but for the fact that the Army was tinctured with the New

Faith, and the Grand Dukes had recently become involved in extensive and lucrative contracts for supplying the troops with meat. The soldiery refusing to eat either beef or mutton or pork, percentages declined. These leaders took up a firm patriotic attitude. The health and morale of the entire army, they declared, was dependent upon a sound nutritive diet obtainable only through the operation of certain radio-active oxydised magneto-carbon-hydrates which exist nowhere save in the muscular tissue of animals. This new heresy endangered the very foundations of Empire! They were not people to compromise where questions of national prosperity were concerned. They suggested, privately, that he should cancel his Revelation. He refused. They then sent him a confidential messenger offering the choice of assassination or deportation within the space of three hours. He inclined to the latter alternative, and was straightway conveyed to the frontier by special train with as many rouble notes in his pocket as he had been able to scrape together in the flurry of departure. Some disturbances broke out when the news of his banishment became known; a few whiffs of grape-shot worked wonders. The majority of his adherents abjured their error; the rest of them, aided by charitable contributions from a secret committee of enthusiasts, found their way abroad to dwell under the shadow of the banished Messiah. The expiatory period was approaching. Russia, on the whole, was glad to see the last of him—particularly the Grand

Ducal party.

A broken man, he decided to establish himself on Nepenthe, drawn thither partly on account of the climate but chiefly by the report of its abounding lobsters and fishes, an article of diet of which he was inordinately fond. Disciples followed singly, and in batches. Their scarlet blouses became a familiar object in the streets of the place; good-natured and harmless folks for the most part who, if they ran up bills with the local tradespeople which they failed to pay, did so not out of natural dishonesty but because they had no money. They used to bathe, in summertime, at a certain little cove near the foot of the promontory on which Madame Steynlin's villa was situated. She watched their naked antics at first with disapproval—what could you expect, she would say, from Russians? Then she observed them eating raw crabs and things. It struck her that they must be hungry. Being a lady of the sentimental type, childless, and never so happy as when feeding or mothering somebody, she took to sending them down baskets of food, or carrying it herself. They were so poor, so far from their homes, so picturesque in those red shirts and leathern belts!

Of late years Madame Steynlin had given up marrying, having at last, after many broken hopes, definitely convinced herself that husbands were only after her money. Rightly or wrongly, she wanted to be loved for herself; loved, she insisted, body and soul. Even as the fires of Erebus slumber

beneath their mantle of ice, she concealed, under a varnish of conventionality—the crust was not so thick in her case—a nature throbbing with passion. She was everlastingly unappeased, because incurably romantic. All life, she truly declared, is a search for a friend. Unfortunately she sought with her eyes open, having never grasped the elementary truth that to find a friend one must close one eye: to keep him—two. She always attributed to men qualities which, she afterwards discovered, they did not possess. Her life since the marrying period had been a breathless succession of love affairs, each more eternal than the last.

In matters such as these, Madame Steynlin was the reverse of the Duchess. True to her ideal of La Pompadour, that lady did not mind how many men danced attendance on her—the more the merrier. Nor did she bother about their ages; for all she cared, they might be, and often were, the veriest crocks. She was rather particular, however, about stiff collars and things; the appearance and conversation of her retinue, she avowed, should be of the kind to pass muster in good society. Madame Steynlin liked to have not more than one man escorting her at a time, and he should be young, healthy-looking and full of life. In regard to minor matters she preferred, if anything, Byronic collars to starched ones; troubling little, for the rest, what costume her cavalier was wearing or what opinions he expressed. In fact, she liked youngsters to be frank, impetuous, extravagant in their views and

out of the common rut. The two ladies had been likened to Divine and Earthly Love, or to Venus Urania and Venus Pandemos—a comparison which was manifestly unfair to both of them.

It was during this summer bathing that Madame Steynlin made the acquaintance of what was, at the time, the Master's favourite disciple. His name happened to be Peter—Peter Arsenievitch Krasnojabkin. He was a fine son of earth—a strapping young giant who threw himself into eating, drinking, and other joys of life with enviable barbaric zest. There was not an ounce of piety in his composition. He had donned the scarlet blouse because he wanted to see Nepenthe and, like the Christians of old, had no money. Driven by that roving spirit which is the Muscovite's heritage and by the desire of all sensible men to taste new lands, new wine, new women, he professed himself a Little White Cow. It was quite the regular thing to do. It brought you to the notice of that secret committee of enthusiasts who paid your travel expenses; it gave you a free trip to the sunny south. Everyone wondered how he had managed to rise so rapidly in the Master's graces. Madame Steynlin now stepped between them. She grew fond of Peter, and marked him for her own. He fulfilled every one of her conditions as to age, costume and opinions. Besides, he was always so gloriously hungry! She invited him to luncheon once or twice, and then began to take Russian lessons from him. "He is only a boy," she would say.

Conversing, as best she could, with this child of nature, it dawned upon her that she had hitherto been mistaken in her estimate of the Russian character. She began to understand the inward sense of that brotherly love, that apostolic spirit, which binds together every class of the immense Empire —to revere their simplicity of soul and calm godlike faith. She revised her former narrow Lutheran views and openly confessed that she was quite wrong in declaring, as once she did, that what the Little White Cows needed was "more soap and less salvation." The magic of love! It softened, not for the first time, her heart towards all humanity and in particular, on this occasion, towards the rest of the saintly band; were they not her brothers and sisters? She even knitted six pairs of warm woollen socks and sent them with a polite message to the Master—a message which was left unanswered, though the socks were never returned. As to Peter —she called him her Little Peter or, in his more expansive moments, Peter the Great. Soon he was always coming to the villa at meal-times and staying for hours afterwards, while they wrestled with the complexities of Russian genders. He made no secret of the pleasure he derived from filling his healthy young stomach at her expense; everything supplementary to that prime condition he took as a gift from the gods. If he had not been so simple-minded he could have wheedled any amount of money out of her. The affair had now been going on for four months—quite a long while, as such affairs went.

Not for the first time did Madame Steynlin experience the drawbacks of her house, as regards natural situation. It was, as Don Francesco often pointed out, "the most unstrategic villa on Nepenthe." Ah, that peninsula, that isthmus, or whatever you called the thing—what on earth had attracted her to the place? What demon had tempted her to buy it? How she envied other people—Keith, for example, who, if he had been a man of that kind, could have allowed any visitor, in broadest daylight, to creep in or out of his mouldy old gateway in the wall without a soul being any the wiser! High-priced horticultural experts had been consulted as to the best means of thickening the vegetation and screening the approaches to the house. They had met with scanty success. The soil was of the most sterile, intractable rock; those few wind-blown olives were dreadfully diaphanous, and Peter's blouse visible from afar—even from the market-place. Everything got about on Nepenthe. People began to twit her about the progress of those "Russian lessons." It became quite a scandal. Signor Malipizzo was more annoyed than anyone else. He hated the whole brood of Russians, and had formed various projects for uprooting the association from the island. His friend the Commissioner thoroughly endorsed these views. Often he declared that something must be done about it.

The Master, despite his seclusion, had heard of the affair. He was grieved, but not unduly so; he had other disciples to choose from. Every new

arrival from Holy Russia, regardless of sex or age, spent some hours or days, as the case might be, alone with the Master in his apartment, in order to be initiated into the Law and impregnated with its full signification: such was the way of the New Jerusalem. By this system of spiritual control he could be sure of finding a successor sooner or later. Besides, the defection of this favourite disciple was only a drop in the ocean of his griefs. What secretly preyed upon his mind was that, on the verge of returning to his former state of worldly prosperity, he had been inspired to issue that Second Revelation regarding warm-blooded beasts. He ought to have known about the Grand Dukes, and what a sacrilegious hot-tempered clique they were! "This comes," he would say, "of placing the service of God above that of my earthly masters." It kept him in exile on this island—the deadlock in the matter of that Second Revelation. The expiatory period was not yet over, though Nepenthe, on the whole, would have been glad to see the last of him —particularly Signor Malipizzo.

Meanwhile, the Little White Cows lived on: the richer in houses, sleeping fifteen or twenty in one room after the happy style of patriarchal Russia —the humbler folk in old ruins, sheds, cellars, or even caverns of the rock. You could do that sort of thing in a climate like Nepenthe, if you were not fastidious in the matter of owls, bats, lizards, toads, earwigs, centipedes, and an occasional scorpion.

Chapter XV

No Russians dwelt within the Cave of Mercury. It was inconveniently remote; it was difficult of approach; moreover, it was haunted. Dreadful rites had been performed there, in olden times. The walls had dripped with human gore. Death-groans of victims slain by the priestly knife resounded in its hollow entrails. Such had been the legend in the days of those monkish chroniclers in whose credulous pages Monsignor Perrelli, incredulous himself, had discovered a mine of curious information.

Then came the Good Duke Alfred. His Highness posed as a conservative in some matters; it pleased him to revive memories of the long-buried past. He cared little about ghosts. He liked to take things in hand. After remarking in his brisk epigrammatic fashion that "not everything old is putrid," he devoted his attention to the Cave of Mercury and caused a flight of convenient stairs to be built, wide enough to admit the passage of two of his

fattest Privy Councillors walking abreast, and leading down to this particular grotto through a cleft in the rock. Nobody knew what happened there under his superintendence. Mankind being ever prone to believe the worst of every great man, all kinds of stupid and even wicked things were said, though not during his lifetime. People vowed that he carried on the old traditions, the tortures and human sacrifices, and even improved upon them in his blithe Renaissance manner. They were ready to supply circumstantial and excruciating details of how, disguised, down to the minutest details of costume, in the semblance of the Evil One, he had sought to prolong his life and invigorate his declining health with the blood of innocent children, artfully done to death after fiendish, lingering agonies. Father Capocchio, needless to say, has some shocking pages on this subject.

Mr. Eames, who had made a careful study of Duke Alfred's reign, came to the conclusion that such excesses were incompatible with the character of a ruler whose love of children was one of his most salient traits. In regard to those other and vaguer accusations, he contended that the Duke was too jovial by nature to have tortured any save those who, in his opinion, thoroughly deserved it. Indeed, he was sceptical about the whole thing. Monsignor Perrelli might have told us the truth, had he cared to do so. But, for reasons which will appear anon, he is remarkably silent on all that concerns the reign of his great contemporary. He

says nothing more than this:

"His Highness deigned, during the same year, to restore, and put into its old working order, the decayed heathen rock-chapel vulgarly known as the Cave of Mercury."

To put into *its old working order;* that would sound rather suspicious, as though to contain a veiled accusation. We must remember, however, that the historian of Nepenthe bore a grudge against his Prince (of which likewise more anon), a grudge which he was far too prudent to vent openly; so bitter and personal a grudge that he may have felt himself justified in making a covert innuendo of this kind whenever he could safely risk it.

Meanwhile, everything remained as before—shrouded in mystery. Being doubly haunted now, by the Duke's victims and by those earlier ones, the cave fell into greater neglect than ever. Simple folk avoided speaking of the place save in a hushed whisper. It became a proverb among the islanders when speaking of something outrageously improbable: "Don't tell me! Such things only happen in the Cave of Mercury." When someone disappeared from his house or hotel without leaving any trace behind—it happened now and then—or when anything disreputable happened to anyone, they always said "Try the Cave," or simply "Try Mercury." The path had crumbled away long ago. Nobody went there, except in broad daylight. It was as safe a place as you could desire, at nighttime, for a murder or a love-affair. Such was the Cave

of Mercury.

Denis had gone to the spot one morning not long after his arrival. He had climbed down the slippery stairs through that dank couloir or funnel in the rock overhung with drooping maidenhair and ivy and umbrageous carobs. He had rested on the little platform outside the cavern's mouth, glancing down a rocky glen upon some patches of vineyard far below, and upwards, at the narrow ribbon of sky overhead. Then he had gone within, to examine what was left of the old masonry, the phallic column and other relics of the past. That was ten days ago. Now he meant to follow Keith's advice and go there at midnight. The moon was full.

"This very night I'll go," he thought.

All was not well with Denis. And the worst of it was, he had no clear notion of what was the matter. He was changing. The world was changing too. It had suddenly expanded. He felt that he, also, ought to expand. There was so much to learn, to see, to know—so much, that it seemed to paralyse his initiative. Could he absorb all this? Would he ever get things into order once more, and recapture his self-possession? Would he ever again be satisfied with himself? It was an invasion of his tranquillity, from within and without. He was restless. Bright ideas never came to him, as of old; or else they were the ideas of other people. A miserable state of affairs! He was becoming an automaton —an echo.

An echo. . . . How right Keith had been!

JOHN AVSTEN

"It's rotten," he concluded. "I'm a ludicrous figure, a pathetic idiot."

The novel impressions of Florence had helped in the disintegration. Nepenthe—its sunshine, its relentless paganism—had done the rest. It shattered his earlier outlook and gave him nothing in exchange. Nothing, and yet everything. That vision of Angelina! It filled his inner being with luxurious content; content and uncertainty. It was there, at the back of every dream, of every intimate thought and every little worldly phrase that he uttered. He was like a man who, looking long at the sun, sees its image floating in heaven, on earth—wherever he casts his eye. Angelina! Nothing else was of any account. How would it all end? He drifted along in blissful apprehension of what the next day might bring. She seemed to have become genuinely well-disposed towards him of late, though in rather a mocking, maternal sort of fashion.

The poetic vein had definitely run dry. Impossible to make things rhyme, somehow. Perhaps his passion was too strong for technical restraints. He tried his hand at prose:

"Your eyes bewilder me. I would liken you to a shaft of sunlight, a withering flame—a black flame, if such there be—for your grace and ardour is even as a flame. Your step is laughter and song. Your hair is a torrent of starless night. The sun is your lover, your god. He takes joy in your perfection. Your slender body palpitates with his imprisoned beams. He has moulded your limbs and kissed your

smooth skin in the days when you . . . nevermore will you whiten those kisses. . . ."

"It won't do," he sadly reflected, laying down the pen. "The adaptation is too palpable. Why does everybody anticipate my ideas? The fact is, I have nothing to say. I can only feel. Everything went right, so long as I was in love with myself. Now everything goes wrong."

Then he remembered Keith's pompous exhortation. "Find yourself! You know the Cave of Mercury? Climb down, one night of full moon——"

"There is something in what he says. This very night I'll go."

It was particularly hard for him, that evening. The Duchess was dining with a party at Madame Steynlin's; it was an open secret that the entertainment would end in a moonlit excursion on the water; she would not return till very late. Angelina would be alone, accessible. It was her duty to guard the house in the absence of its mistress. He might have gone there on some pretext and talked awhile, and looked into her elvish eyes and listened to that southern voice, rich and clear as a bell. Almost he yielded. He thought of the ineptitude of the whole undertaking and, in particular, of those slippery stairs; one might break one's neck there at such an hour of the night. Unless one wore tennis shoes——

Well, he would wear them. He would resist the temptation and approve himself a man. Everybody, even the Duchess, was always telling him to

be a man. He would find himself. Keith was right.

The night came.

He descended noiselessly into the cool and dark chasm, resting awhile on a ledge about half-way down, to drink in the spirit of the place. All was silent. Dim masses towered overhead; through rifts in the rocky fabric he caught glimmerings, strange and yet familiar, of the landscape down below. It swam in the milky radiance of a full moon whose light streamed down from some undiscoverable source behind the mountain, suffusing the distant vineyards and trees with a ghostly tinge of green. Like looking into another world, he thought; a poet's world. Calmly it lay there, full of splendour. How well one could understand, in such a place, the glamour, the romance, of night! Romance. . . . What was left of life without romance? He remembered his talk with Marten; he thought of the scientist's crude notions of romance. He pitied the materialism which denied him joys like these. This moonlit landscape—how full of suggestion! That grotto down below—what tales it could unfold!

The Cave of Mercury. . . .

How had Mercury, the arch-thief, come to be presiding genius here? Denis knew; his friend Eames had explained everything to him. Mercury had nothing whatever to do with the site. That name had been proved by the bibliographer to be the invention of some pedantic monk who liked to display his learning to a generation avid of antiquities,

a generation which insisted on attaching a Roman deity to every cavern. It was a wilful fabrication, made in the infancy of archæology when historical criticism was non-existent. And the same with all those stories about human sacrifices and tortures. There was not a word of truth in them. So Mr. Eames had decided, after a systematic investigation both of the older authorities and of the grotto itself. The legends, too, were simply invented to give a zest to a locality whose original antique name had apparently been lost, though he had not yet abandoned all hope of stumbling across it by one of those lucky accidents which reward the lover of old parchment and title-deeds. A pure invention. It was plain to Mr. Eames from what remained of ancient symbols on the spot, that the cave had been consecrated to older and worthier rites—to some mysterious, primeval, fecund Mother of Earth. Her name, like that of her habitation, had lapsed into oblivion.

"There is something grand in this old animistic conception." Eames had said. "Later on, under the Romans, the place seems to have been dedicated to Priapic rites. That is rather a depreciation, isn't it? It brings us down from fruitfulness to mere lasciviousness. But where are you going to draw the line? Everything tends to lose its hallowed meaning; it becomes degraded, bestialized. Still, the roots of the idea are sound. In giving sensual attributes to a garden god the ancients had in mind the recklessness, the spendthrift abundance, of all

nature—not excluding our own. They tried to explain how it came about that the sanest man is liable, under the stress of desire, to acts of which he vainly repents at leisure. I don't suppose they meant to justify those acts. If they had, they would have given a less equivocal position to Priapus in their celestial hierarchy. Priapus, you know, was not wholly divine. I think they only wanted to make it quite clear that we cannot drive out nature with a fork. I wish we could," he added.

And then he sighed. The poor fellow was thinking, at that moment, of balloons.

Denis remembered this conversation. Earth-worship; the cult of those generative forces which weld together in one mighty instinct the highest and lowliest of terrestrial creatures. . . . The inalienable right of man and beast to enact that which shall confound death, and replenish the land with youth, and joy, and teeming life. The right which priestly castes of every age have striven to repress, which triumphs over every obstacle and sanctifies, by its fruits, the wildest impulses of man. The right to love!

Musing thus, he began to understand why men of old, who looked things squarely in the face, should have deified this friendly, all-compelling passion. He reverenced the fierce necessity which drives the living world to its fairest and sole enduring effort. Be fruitful and multiply. He recognized for the first time that he was not a lonely figure on earth, but absorbed into a solemn and

eternal movement; bound close to the throbbing heart of the Universe. There was grandeur, there was repose, in being able to regard himself as an integral part of nature, destined to create and leave his mark. He felt that he was growing into harmony with permanent things—finding himself. He realized now what Keith had meant.

It cost him quite an effort to tear himself away from that ledge. He began to descend once more.

Near the entrance of the Cave he paused abruptly. It seemed as if a sound had issued from the interior of the rock. He listened. It came again—a human sound, unquestionably, and within a few yards of his face. A whisper. There was something going on—Earth-worship. . . .

Suddenly a succession of words broke upon the stillness—breathless words, spoken in a language which not everybody could have translated. He recognized the voice. It said:

"Ego te amare tantum! Non volere? Non piacere? Non capire? Oh Lord, can't you understand?"

It was Mr. Marten's voice. Mr. Marten was being romantic. No answer came to his fervent pleadings. Perhaps they were not coherent enough. He began again, *tremolo agitato, con molto sentimento:*

"O ego te amare tantum! Nemo sapit nihil. Duchessa in barca aquatica cum magna compania. Redibit tardissimo. Niente timor. Amare multissimo! Ego morire sine te. Morire. Moriturus. Capito? Non capire? Oh, capire be blowed!"

There was a short pause. The language seems to have been understood this time. For, amid a ripple of laughter, a rich southern voice was heard to say with a sigh of mock resignation:

"Sia fatta la volontà di Dio!"

Then silence. . . .

Denis turned. He walked up the steps as in a dream, neither slowly nor fast. No one was ever more unhappy, though he scarcely felt as yet the depths of his own humiliation. It was more like a stab—a numbing assassin-like stab. He could hear the beatings of his heart.

He reached the upper level of the town, he knew not how.

All lay quiet as he found his way among the familiar buildings. It was after midnight; most of the lamps had been extinguished. The streets were deserted. He heard, in the distance, the sound of a drunken wayfarer reeling homewards from a tavern or from the Club.

In one of the little roadways that converge upon the marketplace something was astir. It was a dun phantom of willowy outline, swaying capriciously to and fro, like a black feather tossed by the wind. Miss Wilberforce! She fluttered down upon a doorstep and began crooning a vulgar song about "Billy had a letter for to go on board a ship." Denis moved to the other side of the narrow path, hoping to escape unobserved. The light was too strong.

"My young friend," she cried in quite a hoarse and altered tone of voice, "we should know each

other! We've had the pleasure, haven't we? Been down to the sea, have you? And what are the wild waves saying?"

Denis stood there, petrified with disgust. Was it possible? Was this the lady who had charmed him the other day? Who had spoken of England and conjured up memories of his own home in the Midlands? With a playful gesture, she sent her hat careering across the street and began to fumble at her breast, unlacing or unbuttoning something. It was horrible, in the moonlight.

A boot, flying merrily over his head, recalled him to his senses. He turned to go, and had already made a few paces when the voice croaked after him:

"Does your mother know you're out?"

Chapter XVI

Some good genius took him by the hand next day and led him to the house of Count Caloveglia, in response to that friendly twice-repeated invitation. The old man saw at a glance that something serious was amiss. He plunged at once, with quick insight, into what he took to be extraneous topics of conversation.

"I am glad you like my fig tree! It gives a distinctive tone to this quiet courtyard, don't you think? I could not have wished for anything more appropriate. Its shape, its associations, are alike pleasing. The fig is a legendary tree; a volume could be written about the stories and superstitions which have twined themselves around it. Some think it was the Biblical Tree of Knowledge. Judas Iscariot, they say, hanged himself on a fig tree. It came from the East—Bacchus brought it on his journey as a gift to mortal men. How much we owe to those of the Greek gods who were yet not wholly

divine! The Romans, too, held it in veneration. You have doubtless heard about the *ficus ruminalis*, at whose feet the cradle of Romulus and Remus was stranded? Among many nations it became the outward symbol of generative forces. The Egyptians consecrated the fig to Isis, that fecund Mother of Earth. Statues of Priapus were carved out of its wood in allusion, possibly, to its reckless fertility or for some analogous reason; it was also held to be sacred, I know not why, to Mercury——"

Denis, during this little speech, had begun to look more troubled than ever. The other continued:

"There is something in the very twistings of that smooth trunk and those heavy-laden branches that suggests fruitfulness. How voluptuously they writhe! A kindly growth, lover of men, their dwellings and ordered ways. That is why we foster it. We are all utilitarians here, Mr. Denis; we think of the main purposes of life. Besides food, it gives us welcome shade at this season; the leaves fall off in winter and allow the sunlight to percolate into our rooms. You will not find evergreen trees planted near our windows. We know the value of sunshine; where the sun enters, we say, the physician does not enter. In England the light is feebler and yet they made this mistake, during the Georgian period of architecture. They thought that houses were invented to be looked at, not to be lived in. Determined to be faithful to the tradition and regardless of the difference in climate, they planted the ilex about those mansions which must be dank and

gloomy in wintertime, however charming, externally, to those who relish the chill Palladian outlines. You have lately been to Florence, I hear? Come! Let us sit indoors. The courtyard is rather too sultry to-day, in spite of the shade. My old servant will bring some tea, presently. Or perhaps you would prefer some wine and a biscuit? Or a glass of liqueur? . . . Well? And Florence?"

"It has left me rather confused, so far," replied Denis. "Some of the things are overwhelming."

"Overwhelming? That is perhaps because you do not see the movement in its continuity, because you have not traced the stream to its source. I can understand your feelings. But one need not be overwhelmed by these men. They were lovable folks, who played with their art like some child that has discovered a long-lost toy. It is a pity that their activities were so hampered by the conventions of religious dogma. Viewed by itself, the Renaissance may seem overwhelming; it shoots up like a portentous lily out of the blood-drenched soil of a thousand battlefields. Let me take you to its real source."

He showed him that little statuette, the Locri Faun. Denis was enchanted with it.

"You have heard of Sir Herbert Street? He also thinks highly of this thing. He is now adviser in art matters to Mr. van Koppen who is a patron of mine and who, I hear, will arrive to-morrow or the day after."

"Street? I met him at my mother's house. Wasn't

he at South Kensington? A great man for dining out. You cannot pick up an evening paper without reading something about him. That kind of man! All the same, he wrote a good book on the Siena School. I liked it, didn't you?"

"It is a fair appreciation, from the collector's point of view. He has stayed with me here once or twice, and given me reason to form a high opinion of his capacities. Now if you compare this Faun with your Florentine art, you will see what I mean by going to the fountain. There is a difference not only in technique, but in outlook. The man who wrought this did not trouble about you, or me, or himself. He had no moods. His art is purely intellectual; he stands aloof, like a glacier. Here the spring issued, crystal-clear. As the river swells in size it grows turbid and discoloured with alien elements—personality, emotions."

"I have noticed that," said Denis. "It is what we call the malady of thought. This Faun, you say, was found on the mainland yonder?"

"Near the site of old Locri, on a piece of ground which still belongs to me. I suspect there are still a good many Greek relics to be excavated on the site. We discovered a Demeter some years ago; a mutilated head in marble; it is now in Paris. You can see the very place from my roof here, on bright days. These men, Mr. Denis, were our masters. Do not be misled by what you are told of the wanton luxury of those shores; do not forget that your view of that age has filtered through Roman stoi-

cism and English puritanism which speak with envy lurking at their hearts—the envy of the incomplete creature for him who dares express himself. A plague has infected the world—the plague of repression. Don't you think that the man who made this Faun was entitled to dine well?"

"I cannot quite make it out," said Denis, still examining the statuette.

"Ah! How does it make you feel?"

"Uneasy."

"You are aware of a struggle between your own mind and that of the artist? I am glad. It is the test of beauty and vitality that a beholder refuses to acquiesce at first glance. There is a conflict to be undergone. This thing thrusts itself upon us; it makes no concessions, does it? And yet one cannot but admire! You will seldom encounter that sensation among the masterpieces of the Renaissance. They welcome you with open arms. That is because we know what their creators were thinking about. They are quite personal and familiar; they had as many moods, one suspects, as a fashionable prima donna. They give pleasure. This Faun gives pleasure and something more—a sense of disquieting intimacy. While intruding upon our reserve with his solemn, stark and almost hostile novelty, he makes at the same time a strange appeal—he touches upon chords in our nature of which we ourselves were barely cognizant. You must yield, Mr. Denis, to this stranger who seems to know so much about you. When you have done so, you will make a

surprising discovery. You have gained a friend —one of those who never change."

"I am trying to," replied Denis. "But it is difficult. We are not brought up that way, nowadays."

"No. Men have lost their frankness, their self-assurance. Whoever yields, must be confident of his own strength. Our contemporaries have lost that feeling. They dare not be themselves. They eke out lack of sincerity by profusion of commonplace. Unlike the heroes of Homer, they repress their tears—they repress everything, save their irrepressible flatulence of mind. They are expansive in unimportant matters and at wrong moments—blown about in a whirl of fatuous extremes. The impersonal note has vanished. Why has it gone, Mr. Denis?" he suddenly asked. "And when did it go?"

The other was rather puzzled what to reply.

"I suppose you could trace its disappearance to the days of which you spoke, when artists began to display their moods to the world. Perhaps further still. Some Roman writers were fond of talking about their own affairs. If they do, the public naturally becomes interested. People like Byron must have had a good deal to do with it. He was always harping on his private life."

He paused, but the Count merely asked:

"No further back than that?"

"I don't know. Christianity made us interested in other people's feelings. Brotherliness, you know. That must have helped. So did Socrates, by the

way. Of course it lowers the general standard. Where everybody can read and write, there's an end of good taste. No, I don't mean that exactly," he added, feeling that he was expressing himself very stupidly.

"Well?"

"Oh, everything! The telegraph and society papers and interviewing and America and yellow journalism . . . and all those family memoirs and diaries and autobiographies and Court scandals. . . . They produce a new kind of public, a public which craves for personalities rather than information. They want to learn about our clothes and incomes and habits. Not a questioning public, I mean; a prying public——"

"A cannibalistic public," said the Count, quietly. "Men cannot live, it seems, save by feeding on their neighbour's life-blood. They prey on each other's nerve-tissues and personal sensations. Everything must be shared. It gives them a feeling of solidarity, I suppose, in a world where they have lost the courage to stand alone. Woe to him who dwells apart! Great things are no longer contemplated with reverence. They are hauled down from their pedestals in order to be rendered accessible to a generation of pigmies; their dignity is soiled by vulgar contact. This lust of handling—what is its ordinary name? Democracy. It has abraded the edge of that keen anthropocentric outlook of the Greeks which exalted whatever was distinctively human. Men have learnt to see beauty here, there,

and everywhere—a little beauty, mark you, not much! They fail to realize that in widening their capacity of appreciation they dilute its intensity. They have watered their wine. There is more to drink. The draught is poorer."

It seemed to Denis that the Count's wine had not been watered.

"Let me show you one or two other things," said the old man.

They wandered about the premises awhile, looking at marbles, prints, intaglios, coins, till a serving man entered— a clean-shaven and rather bony old creature whom the Count called Andrea—to announce tea. Denis was feeling calmer; he had fallen under the beguiling influence of this place. He realized that his host was different from the artist type he had hitherto encountered; more profound, more veracious. Already he formed the project of returning to listen to his melodious voice and learn some more about that Hellenic life which had hitherto been a sealed book to him. Nobody ever spoke to him after the Count's fashion. He contrasted his address with the bantering, half-apologetic supercilious tone of those other elderly persons who had heretofore deigned to enlighten him. He was flattered and pleased at being taken seriously and bidden to think in this straightforward, manly fashion; it unstrung his reserve and medicined to his wounded self-respect.

"So your mother would like to see you in Parliament?" asked the Count. "Politics are apt to be a

dirty game. One cannot touch dirt without soiling one's hands. We have a deputy here, the Commendator Morena—well, one does not like to speak about him. Let me ask you a question, Mr. Denis. Why do politicians exist?"

"I suppose the answer would be that it is profitable to mankind to be run by somebody."

"Profitable, at all events, to those who do the running. Your good Sir Herbert Street has lately sent me a batch of books about the ideal public life of the future. Socialistic forecasts, and that kind of literature. He is a world-improver, you know, among other things. They have amused me more than I thought they would. That venerable blunder: to think that in changing the form of government you change the heart of man. And in other respects, too, these dreamers are at sea. For surely we should aim at simplification of machinery. Conceive, now, the state of affairs where everybody is more or less employed by the community —the community, that comfortable word!—in some patriotic business or other. Everybody an official, all controlling each other! It would be worse than the Spanish Inquisition. A man could live at Toledo by subscribing to certain fixed opinions; he could be assured of a reasonable degree of privacy. Nothing could save him, under socialism. An insupportable world! When people cease to reflect they become idealists."

"I suppose they do," replied Denis, rather dubiously. Then it struck him that this might account

for his own hazy state of mind—this lack of occupation or guiding principle. For the rest, he had not given much thought to such questions. To be a politician—it was one of the few projects which had never seriously entered his head. After a pause, he remarked:

"I can't help noticing that portrait over there. It's a very pretty thing."

"The little pastel? It is a sketch of my daughter Matilda. I did it myself when she was here last Christmas. Poor child, she can only come for her holidays; there is no chance of a respectable education on this island. But I run over to see her every now and then. You will observe I am not much of a colourist!"

"You have been parsimonious with the tints. It reminds me of some of Lenbach's work which I saw at Florence; it is in the same manner."

"It appears you like art," said the Count. "Why not devote yourself to it? But perhaps your English social conditions are not propitious. Here is a letter from a friend of mine which arrived this morning; you know his name—I will not mention it! A well-known Academician, whose life is typical of your attitude towards art. Such a good fellow. He likes shooting and fishing; he is a favourite at Court, and quite an authority on dress-reform. He now writes to ask me about some detail of Greek costume which he requires for one of his lectures to a Ladies' Guild. Art, to him, is not a jealous mistress; she is an indulgent companion, who will amiably close

an eye and permit a few wayside flirtations to her lover—enthusiasms for quite other ideals, and for the joys of good society in general. That is the way to live a happy life. It is not the way to create masterpieces."

"I would take myself seriously, I think," said Denis. "I would not dissipate my energies."

He meant it. To be an artist—it dawned upon him that this was his true vocation. To renounce pleasure and discipline the mind; to live a life of self-denial, submitting himself humbly to the inspiration of the great masters. . . . To be serene, like this old man; to avoid that facile, glib, composite note—those monkey-tricks of cleverness. . . .

Then, after this vision had passed before his eyes like a flash, he remembered his grief. The notion of becoming a world-famous artist lost all meaning for him. Everything was blighted. There was not a grain of solace to be found on earth.

The Count, meanwhile, was looking with concern upon his companion's grave face, whose flawless profile might have emerged into life under the thought-laden chisel of Lysippus. He wondered what he could say or do to drive away this melancholy. The youth had been so bright that day at the entertainment of the Duchess; he seemed to have stepped straight out of a sunny dialogue of Plato. Serious trouble now shone out of his eyes. Something had happened. Something was wrong with him; wrong, too—he reflected—with a world which could find no better occupation for such a

person than to hand round buttered tea-cakes at an old woman's party to a crowd of cosmopolitan scandalmongers.

Denis rose, remarking:

"I wish I could stay a little longer! But it is getting so late. I'm afraid I must be going."

He held out his hand.

"You have caught me in a somewhat sad and depressed mood, I fear," replied the other, heaving a most artistic sigh. And his features suddenly looked quite careworn. As a matter of fact, he had not been so joyous for many long years—that news of Mr. van Koppen's proximate arrival having made him feel fifty years younger and, but for his ingrained sense of Hellenic moderation, almost ready to dance with delight.

"I am sorry I have been so despondent," he went on. "Sometimes one cannot help oneself. It shall not occur again! I will try to be more amusing next time you come. If I thought it would help, I would communicate my sorrows and claim your sympathy. But what does it avail to unburden oneself? Friends will share our joys, but every man is a solitary in his griefs. One soon finds that out! One soon realizes the vanity of all those talks about the consolations of philosophy and the comforts of religion, doesn't one? I suppose even you have your moments of dejection?"

"One worries about things now and then. It is perfectly natural, I daresay."

"Perfectly. We are not stones—least of all

persons like yourself. I would not be at your age again, not for the wealth of Crœsus! I suffered too much. All young people suffer too much; they bear it silently, like heroes. The eye of youth dilates and distorts the images. The focussing process is painful. Youth has no norm. It was in one of my worst fits of despondency, I remember, that my old teacher gave me certain advice which, after I had puzzled it out, did me some good. In fact, I have acted upon it to this day; I recall it as plainly as if he were speaking now. Well, I am sorry you are leaving. I would keep you here if I could. But I hope you will not forget to come another day. You have cheered me up wonderfully! Shall Andrea find you a carriage?"

"What did he say?" asked Denis.

"The old teacher? Let me see. . . . He said: do not be discomposed by the opinions of inept persons. Do not swim with the crowd. They who are all things to their neighbours, cease to be anything to themselves. Even a diamond can have too many facets. Avoid the attrition of vulgar minds; keep your edges intact. He also said: a man can protect himself with fists or sword but his best weapon is his intellect. A weapon must be forged in the fire. The fire, in our case, is tribulation. It must also be kept untarnished. If the mind is clean, the body can take care of itself. He said: delve deeply; not too deeply into the past, for it may make you derivative; nor yet into yourself—it will make you introspective. Delve into the living world and strive

to bind yourself to its movements by a chain of your own welding. Once that contact is established, you are unassailable. Externalize yourself! He told me many things of this kind. You think I was consoled by his words? Not in the slightest degree. I was annoyed. It struck me, at the moment, as quite ordinary advice. In fact, I thought him rather a hypocrite; anybody could have spoken as he did! I was so disappointed that I went to him next day and told him frankly what I thought of his counsel. He said—do you know what he said?"

"I cannot even guess."

"He said: 'What is all wisdom save a collection of platitudes? Take fifty of our current proverbial sayings—they are so trite, so threadbare, that we can hardly bring our lips to utter them. None the less they embody the concentrated experience of the race, and the man who orders his life according to their teachings cannot go far wrong. How easy that seems! Has anyone ever done so? Never. Has any man ever attained to inner harmony by pondering the experience of others? Not since the world began! He must pass through the fire.' "

"I had no teacher like that," observed Denis. "He must have been a man of the right kind."

"Oh, he meant well, the old rascal," replied the Count with a curious little smile.

Chapter XVII

Denis descended from the Old Town. At a turn of the road he overtook the bishop who was moving slowly in the same direction.

"How is Mrs. Meadows?" enquired the young man.

"Not particularly well, I'm afraid. And the Count?"

"Oh, quite all right."

They walked along in silence, having little to say to each other. That visit had done Denis good; he would return soon again, if only for the purpose of cheering up the lonely old man who, at the last moment, had given him a photograph of the Locri Faun, with a kindly inscription from himself. He was not to show it to anybody, the Count had said —not yet! The government must not hear about that relic—not yet! Later on, perhaps very soon, everything would be in order. Denis cherished that photo in his pocket. He was thinking, too, of the

pastel—the face of Matilda, which seemed like a star shining through the mist. . . . Then he remembered the bishop walking at his side. He felt he ought to say something more to this dry Colonial whom he could not help contrasting, greatly to his disadvantage, with the Count.

"Hasn't it been hot to-day?"

"Stifling," replied Mr. Heard. "The warmest day we have had, so far. Not a breath of wind."

"Not a breath. . . ."

The conversation flagged once more. They did not hit it off, somehow; they seemed to drift further apart every time they met. Each was preoccupied with his own thoughts. The bishop was more taciturn than usual; the interview with his cousin had not been quite a success.

Denis, after a while, made another effort. He spoke of some of Count Caloveglia's antiquities and, one thing leading to another, told Mr. Heard the story of a friend of his in Florence who had excavated some wonderful early Italian pots, fragments of them, out of an old garden well. They were all lustred, he said.

"That must have been a very pleasant surprise," observed the bishop, who had small use for lustred ware and lunatics who collected it. Feeling that it was his turn to say something, he remarked:

"I am dining with the Duchess to-night. Will you be there?"

"No," replied the young man with an unwonted air of decision. Never again would he be seen in

that austere old convent, built by the Good Duke Alfred. Never again! Promptly, however, he toned down the harshness of his answer by adding that the lady had very kindly asked him to come, but he couldn't manage it, that evening.

"I shall have to console her about the burglary," continued the bishop.

"What burglary?"

Mr. Heard explained that the premises had been entered while the Duchess was dining at Madame Steynlin's on the previous evening, the night of the water-party. Evidently the work of a man who knew his business. A man familiar with the ins and outs of the house. And a man of taste, into the bargain. All the sham articles had been left untouched; he had gone off with nothing but genuine things—a few precious crucifixes and bonbonnières. No one had the faintest idea who the thief was. Most mysterious! The disaster could hardly have occurred but for the fact that the young girl Angelina, who was supposed to sleep on the premises, had been called away late at night to look after a suffering aunt. The old woman, it appeared, was liable to sudden heart-attacks. She had been round to see the Duchess early in the morning with endless apologies, and had fortunately been able to corroborate her niece's story.

"I am glad of it," concluded the bishop. "Because that maid, when I saw her, struck me as rather a flighty young person—the sort of girl who would take advantage of her mistress's absence to have a

little flirtation with a policeman round the corner. I am glad the aunt could explain things so satisfactorily. I was wrong about that girl. Shows how careful one must be in judging of other people, doesn't it? I must say she looked to me like a regular little coquette."

Denis had so little sympathetic comment to make on this painful story that Mr. Heard was quite surprised at his indifference. He always understood the young man to be a particular friend of the Duchess.

"These artistic people!" he thought. "They have quite another way of looking at things. Dear me. I shall never live to understand them."

The two separated at the market-place without much reluctance on either side.

During dinner, the Duchess was calm about her misfortune. She bore it well. She had been vigorously consoled by Don Francesco who pointed out that such little things are trials of faith and that she ought to be thankful for this opportunity of proving how little she cared for earthly riches. While not exactly thankful, she was certainly as resigned as anybody could have been. Angelina had already been taken into grace again, at the charitable suggestion of the priest. Everyone was puzzling who the thief could be (it happened to be Mr. Richards); the police had not discovered the faintest clue.

"It does not much matter if they do," said Don Francesco. "I don't think, my dear lady, that you will get the judge to take up your case very actively.

You know how he hates the clericals. In fact, I fear he will not move a finger unless the culprit also happens to be a good believer. In that case, he might lock him up. He is so fond of imprisoning Catholics!"

"A bad state of the law," commented the bishop.

"It is," replied Don Francesco. "And perhaps you do not know," he added, turning to all the company, "that there has been another robbery as well, doubtless by the same hand. Yes! I only heard of it an hour ago. Poor Miss Wilberforce is the victim. She is terribly upset. A number of valuables have disappeared from her house; they must have been ransacked, she thinks, at the time of Mr. Keith's party. I understand she was rather overcome on that occasion. The thief seems to have been aware of her condition, and to have profited by it."

"Poor Miss Wilberforce!" said everybody. They were all sorry for poor Miss Wilberforce.

It was a rather dull dinner-party on the whole. Mr. Heard left at half-past eleven.

Passing the Club on his way home, he remembered his intention of looking in there and perhaps doing good to a few of those fellows.

He climbed up the stairs. There was a fearful row going on. The place was crammed with members of various nationalities, drinking and arguing amid clouds of tobacco smoke. They seemed all to be at loggerheads with one another and on the verge of breaking out into violence, the south wind having

been particularly objectionable all day long. A good deal of filthy and profane language was being used —it was worse than those hot places he had known in Africa. That pink-faced old drunkard known as Charles was the only person who made any signs of recognizing him. He half rose from his chair with a genial: "Hello, Bishop——" and instantly collapsed again. Mr. Muhlen was there; he bowed rather distantly. A tremulous pale-faced youngster invited him pressingly to a drink, and just as the bishop was on the verge of accepting with a view to getting the victim out of that den of vice, the lad suddenly remarked: "Excuse me, won't you?" and tottered out of the door. They were too far gone to be spoken to with any prospects of success. Things might have been different if the restraining influence of Mr. Freddy Parker could have made itself felt, but that gentleman was at home, his lady being not very well. In the Commissioner's absence Mr. Richards, the respectable Vice-President, was making his voice heard. Sober or not, he was certainly articulate and delighted with himself, as, stroking his beard placidly, he roared out above the crowd:

"I've no use for makeshifts. Honesty is a makeshift. A makeshift for saving time. Whoever wants to save time is not fit for the society of gentlemen."

"Hear, hear!"

"Call yourself a gentleman?" enquired another.

"Just a makeshift. You won't hear honesty talked about in the great periods of the world's history.

It's the small tradesman's invention, is honesty. He hasn't the brains to earn anything more than three and a half per cent. That's why he is always in such a hurry to finish his first little deal and get on with the next one. Else he'd starve. Hence honesty. Three and a half per cent! Who's going to pick that up? People who earn three hundred don't cackle about honesty."

"Call yourself a gentleman? Outside!"

"I've no use for honesty. It's the small man's flapdoodle, is honesty. This world isn't made for small men! I am talking to you over there—the funny little bounder who made the offensive remark just now."

"Are you? Well, take that!"

A glass tumbler, which Mr. Richards dodged in quite a professional manner, came hurtling through the air and missed the bishop's forehead by about four inches.

That crowd was past his aid. He turned to go. As he did so, a curious idea flitted through his brain. This Mr. Richards—was he, perhaps, the burglar? He was; but Mr. Heard dashed aside the horrible suspicion, mindful of the mistake he had made about Angelina's character and how careful one must be in judging of other people. The voice, meanwhile, pursued him down the stairs:

"No, gentlemen! I've no use for an honest man. He always lets you down. Fortunately, he is rather rare——"

Mr. Heard slept badly that night, for the first

time since his arrival on Nepenthe. It was unbearably hot. And that visit to Mrs. Meadows had also troubled him a little.

The Old Town looked different on this occasion. A sullen death-like stillness, a menacing stagnation, hung about those pink houses. Not a leaf was astir under the burning sirocco sky. Even old Caterina, when he saw her, seemed to be afflicted, somehow.

"Soffre, la Signora," she said. The lady was suffering.

The bishop would not have recognized his cousin after all those years; not if he had met her in the street at least. She greeted him affectionately and they talked for a long time of family matters. It was true, then. Her husband's leave had been again postponed. Perhaps she would travel back to England with him, and there await the arrival of Meadows. She would let him know definitely in a day or two.

He watched her carefully while she conversed, trying to reconstruct, out of that woman's face, the childish features he dimly remembered. They were effaced. He could see what Keith had meant when he described her as "tailor-made." There was something clear-cut about her, something not exactly harsh, but savouring of decision. She was plainly a personality—not an ordinary type. The lines of her face told their story. They had been hammered into a kind of hard efficiency. But over that exterior of tranquil self-possession was superimposed something else—certain marks of recent

trouble. Her eyes looked almost as if she had been weeping. She made a tremendous show of cheeriness, however, calling him Tommy as in olden days.

Just a little headache. This sirocco. It was bad enough when it blew in the ordinary fashion. But quite intolerable when it hung breathlessly about the air like this. Mr. Eames—he once called it *plumbeus Auster*. That meant leaden, didn't it? Everybody had headaches, more or less.

Was she speaking the truth? The bishop decided that she had a headache and that this south wind was certainly unendurable. None the less, he suspected that she was employing the common subterfuge—telling the truth, but not the whole truth; perhaps not even the main part of it. She was holding back something.

"You haven't attended to these roses lately," he said, observing that the flowers had not been changed and that their fallen petals strewed the tables. "They looked so fresh when I was here alone the other day."

"What a dreadful person you are, Tommy, for noticing things. First you discover my headache, and now those flowers! I see I shall have to be careful with you. Perhaps you would like to look at my precipice and tell me if there is anything wrong with that too? You have heard of the old French lady, I daresay. She ended, you know, in not approving of it at all. We can have tea when we come back. And after that perhaps you will let me know what is wrong with baby!"

"I can tell you that without looking at him. He is teething."

"Clever boy! As a matter of fact, he isn't. But I had to make some excuse to the dear Duchess."

They climbed up the short slope and found themselves looking towards the sea over the face of a dizzy cliff. A falcon, on their approach, started with rustle of wings from its ledge and then swayed crazily over the abyss. Watching this bird, the bishop felt a sudden void in his stomach. A sensation of blackness came before his eyes—sky and sea were merged together—his feet were treading on air. He promptly sat down.

"Not an inch nearer!" he declared. "Not for a thousand pounds. If you go along that edge again, I shall have to look the other way. It makes me feel empty inside."

"I'm not in the least giddy," she laughed. "There was an English boy who threw himself over this cliff for a bet—you have heard the story? They never found his body. It's a good place for throwing oneself down, isn't it?"

She seemed to consider the idea quite seriously.

"Well?" she pursued. "Have you any fault to find with my precipice?"

"I have. It ought to be railed in. It is dangerous. What a temptation this cliff must be to anyone who has an enemy to dispose of! It would be so simple," he added, laughing.

"That advantage has never struck me before. ..."

These and other things passed through Mr.

Heard's mind as he lay in bed that evening. He came to the conclusion that he could not quite make his cousin out. Had something upset her? And what did she mean by that sudden conundrum:

"Do you know anything, Tommy, about our laws of illegitimacy?"

"Nothing," he had replied, "except that they are a disgrace to a civilized country. Everybody knows that."

She seemed to be disappointed. Perhaps she mistrusted him. The thought gave him a little pain. He had done nothing to merit mistrust. He was frank and open himself; he liked others to be the same.

What was the use of thinking about it? He knew tantalizingly little about his cousin—nothing but scraps of information gathered from his mother's letters to him. He would call again in a day or two and make some definite arrangements about their journey to England. Perhaps he had talked more dully than usual. . . . Or could it be the south wind?

Neither of these explanations was wholly convincing.

Chapter XVIII

Nothing was happening. For the first time since many years, the Nepenthe season threatened to be a failure. It was the dullest spring on record. And yet there was a quality in that heavy atmosphere which seemed to threaten mischief. Everybody agreed that it had never been quite so bad as this. Meanwhile, people yawned. They were bored stiff. As a source of gossip, those two burglaries were a negligible quantity. So was the little accident which had just happened to Mr. Keith, who ruefully declared he had done it on purpose, in order to liven things up. No one was likely to be taken in by this kind of talk, because the accident was of an inglorious and even ludicrous kind.

Being very short-sighted he had managed to stumble backwards, somehow or other, into a large receptacle of lime which was being slaked for patching up a wall. Lime, in that condition, is boiling hot. Mr. Keith's trousers were rather badly

scalded. He was sensitive on that point. He suffered a good deal. People came to express their sympathy. The pain made him more tedious, long-winded and exhortatory than usual. At that particular moment Denis was being victimized. He had thoughtlessly called to express his sympathy, to see those celebrated cannas, and because he could not bear to be alone with his thoughts just then.

"Suffering!" exclaimed Mr. Keith. "That is what you young poets want. At present you are too unperplexed and glib. Suffering! It would enlarge your repertoire; it would make you more human, individual, and truthful. What is the unforgivable sin in poetry? Lack of candour. How shall there be candour if the poet lacks worldly experience? Suffering! That is what you people want. It would make men of you."

Mr. Keith was considerably denser than Count Caloveglia. But even he, during this oration, could not help noticing that it jarred on his listener's nerves; there was something wrong, he concluded.

Denis had not a word to say in reply. As if anyone could be more suffering than himself! He was full of a dumb ache. He marvelled at Keith's obtuseness.

"Come and see my cannas," said the other with a kind of brutal tactfulness. "There is a curious story attached to them. I must tell it you one of these days. It sounds like a fairy tale. You like fairy tales?"

"I do," replied Denis.

"Then we have one point in common. I could listen to them for hours. There is something eternal about them. If you ever want to get anything out of me, Denis, tell me a fairy tale."

"I must remember that," replied Denis with a wan smile. "There is one thing I should very much like to get out of you; the secret of your zest in life. You have so many interests. How do you manage it?"

"Heredity, I suppose. It has given me a kind of violent driving power. I take things by the throat. Have you ever heard of Thomas Keith, a soldier in a Highland regiment, who became governor of the Holy City of Medina? No, I suppose you have not. And yet he must have been a remarkable man, to obtain this unique position in the world. No interest in Arabian history? Why not? Well, Thomas Keith—that is my stock. Pirates and adventurers. Of course I live sensibly. Shall I give you my recipe for happiness? I find everything useful and nothing indispensable. I find everything wonderful and nothing miraculous. I reverence the body. I avoid first causes like the plague. You will find that a pretty good recipe, Denis."

The young man wondered whether the prescription would be of any avail for his particular complaint.

Then they went into the garden, Mr. Keith hobbling painfully with two sticks and indulging in very bad language. They paused awhile under some trellis work covered with a profusion of Japa-

nese convolvuluses, pale blue, slate colour, rose-tinted, purple, deep red, with white and coloured bands—a marvellous display of fragile beauty.

"I have never seen anything like it!" declared Denis.

"They die away in winter. I get fresh seeds every year from Japan, the latest varieties. How they cling for support to the wooden framework! How delicate and fair! One hardly dares to touch them. Are you always going to be a convolvulus, Denis?"

"Me? Oh, I see what you mean. Were you never a convolvulus, Mr. Keith?"

His friend laughed.

"It must have been a good while ago. You don't like advice, do you? Have you ever heard of that Sparker affair?"

"You don't mean to say——"

"Yes. That was me. That was my little contribution to the gaiety of University life. So you see I am in the position to give advice to people like yourself. I think you should cultivate the function of the real, and try to remain in contact with phenomena. Noumena are bad for a youngster. But perhaps you are not interested in psychology?"

"Not exactly, I'm afraid," replied Denis who was more anxious to see those cannas.

"So I perceive. Wouldn't you get more fun out of life if you were? I am nearly done with psychology now," he added. "It was the Greek philosophers before then. When I take up a subject this is what I do. I don't ask what are Aristotle's

teachings or relations to his age or to humanity. That would lead me too far. I ask myself: what has this fellow got to say to me? To me, you understand. To me."

"That must simplify matters."

"It does," replied Keith, quite unaware of the faint tinge of College irony in the other's words. "Direct experience comes only from life. But you can get a kind of substitute out of books. Perhaps you are afraid of them? Take the fellows by the throat! See what they have to say. Make them disgorge. Get at their facts. Pull them to pieces. I tell you what, Denis. You must go through a course of Samuel Butler. You are moving in the same direction; perhaps he may be a warning to you. I took him up, I remember, during my biological period. He was exactly like yourself—bewildered by phenomena."

Denis, meekly resigned, enquired:

"Was he?"

"I spent nearly a week over Butler. I found him interesting not for what he writes, but for what he is. A landmark. Think of when he wrote. It was an age of giants—Darwin and the rest of them. Their facts were too much for him; they impinged on some obscure old prejudices of his. They drove him into a clever perversity of humour. They account for his catlike touches, his contrariness, his fondness for scoring off everybody from the Deity downwards, his premeditated irresponsibilities, his——"

"Did he not prove that the Odyssey was written by a woman?"

"He did. Anything to escape from realities—that was his maxim. He puzzled his contemporaries. But we can now locate him with absolute certainty. He personifies the Revolt from Reason. *Surtout, mon ami, point de zèle.* He talks about the Scylla of Atheism and the Charybdis of Christianity—a state of mind which, by the way, is not conducive to bold navigation. He was always wavering between the two in an attitude of suburban defiance, reconciling what is irreconcilable by extracting funny analogies all around for the edification of "nice people" like himself. Oh, very English! He did not lack candour or intelligence. Nor do you. He understood the teachings of the giants. So do you. But they irked him. To revenge himself he laid penny crackers under their pedestals. His whole intellectual fortune was spent in buying penny crackers. There was something cheeky and pre-adolescent about him—a kind of virginal ferocity. That iridescent charm of sexlessness which somebody, one of these days, must be good enough to analyse for us! He lacked the male attributes of humility, reverence and sense of proportion."

Mr. Keith paused, but it was only to take breath.

"Did he?" enquired Denis. "The sense of proportion——"

"The tail of a cow was just as important to him as the tail of a comet; more important, if it could be turned into a joke. Look at the back of his mind

and you will always see the same thing: horror of a fact. That is what lies before you, Denis, if, in a world of facts, you refuse to assimilate them. They will disagree with you, as they disagreed with Butler. They will drive you where they drove him —into abstractions. Read Butler! You will find him full of abstractions. Others went the same way. The painter Watts, for instance. He also suffered under the reign of the giants. He also took refuge in abstractions. Faith leading Hope towards Despair. Why don't you write a book about these things, Denis?"

"I am going to be an artist."

"An artist? That is better than a poet. Verse-making is a little out of date, is it not? It corresponds to juvenile stages of human development. Poets are a case of genepistasis. If they would at least get a new stock of ideas! Their demonology is so hopelessly threadbare. But why an artist? I think you were made for a bank manager, Denis. Don't look so surprised. Everybody grows up, you know. Shelley, if he had lived long enough, would have become a passable gentleman farmer. You can take my word for that."

"I suppose I shall have to," replied the young man.

"Don't take Mr. Keith's word for anything!" said a voice behind his shoulder.

It was Don Francesco, who had come upon them unawares. He now removed his hat and began to mop his forehead and various double chins with a

many-tinted handkerchief as large as a tablecloth.

"My dear Don Francesco!" said Keith. "You always interrupt me in the middle of my sermons. What shall we do with you?"

"Give me something to drink," replied the priest. "Else I shall evaporate, leaving nothing but a grease stain on this beautiful garden path."

"To evaporate," said Keith, with a tinge of sadness in his voice. "What an ideal resolution!"

"I'll get you some wine out of the house," suggested Denis politely. "But first of all tell me this. Mr. Keith has been giving me his recipe for happiness. What is yours?"

"Happiness is a question of age. The bachelor of forty—he is the happy man."

"That does not help me much," said Denis. "But I'll get your wine, all the same."

He went.

"A nice young fellow," observed the priest. "This little accident of yours," he continued, "does not reflect itself on your face. You always look like a baby, Keith. What is your secret? I believe you have concluded a pact with the devil for your soul."

"To tell you the truth, Don Francesco, he never made me an offer for it."

"Sensible devil! He knows he will get it sooner or later for nothing."

They conversed awhile till Denis returned, bearing sundry bottles and glasses on a tray. The priest smiled at the sight. Light-hearted allusions to

Ganymede rose to his lips, but were repressed. He swallowed down the rising inclination to be classical at the expense of good taste, and engulfed, on the top of it, as a kind of paper-weight, a vast tumblerful of red Nepenthe wine. The draught instead of cheering seemed to make him suddenly despondent. He wiped his lips and remarked, in a grave and almost conscience-stricken manner:

"I have some unpleasant news for you, gentlemen. The fountain of Saint Elias has ceased to flow. We heard it this morning from a sailor, an unusually trustworthy person—a man, I mean, who can be relied upon to tell the truth when there is nothing to be gained by concealing or distorting it. The thing must have happened last night. Yes, it has dried up altogether. What is to be done?"

"You don't say so," remarked Keith. "This is really interesting! I thought something was going to happen. I suppose your people are rather alarmed?"

Denis interrupted:

"I don't understand what you are talking about. Why should not a fountain dry up if it wants to? And what does it matter to anybody?"

"What does it matter?" echoed the priest. "This is no ordinary fountain, I am sorry to say. Have you never heard of Beelzebub?"

Chapter XIX

Now, with regard to fountains, it is to be noted that Nepenthe, an islet of volcanic stone rising out of the blue Mediterranean, has never—for all its natural attractions—been renowned for cool springs and bubbling streamlets. There is, to be sure, a charming couplet in some old humanist about *lympha Nepenthi;* but modern scholars are disposed to think either that the text is corrupt and that the writer was picturing an imaginary *nympha*—some laughing sea-lady—or else that he merely indulged in one of those poetic flights which are a feature of the literature of his period. For whatever the cause may be—whether internal fires have scorched up the natural humours of the soil, or whether the waters of Nepenthe are of such peculiar heaviness that, instead of flowing upwards in the shape of fountains, they tumble downwards into caverns below the sea—the fact remains: Nepenthe is a waterless land. And this may well be

the reason, as several thoughtful observers have already pointed out, why its wines are so abundant in quantity, so cheap in price, and of such super-excellent flavour. For it is a fact conformable to that law of compensation which regulates all earthly affairs, a fact borne out by the universal experience of mankind, that God, when He takes away with one hand, gives with the other. Lack of water, on the face of things, might be deemed a considerable hardship. There are tracts in Africa where people have been known to barter wives and children for a cupful of the liquid element. Of the inhabitants of Nepenthe it must be said to their credit that they endure their lot with equanimity, and even cheerfulness. Their wine costs nothing. Why grumble at the inscrutable ways of Providence? Why be thirsty, why be sober, when you can get as drunk as a lord for the asking?

For the rest, there are indications to show that such was not the original condition of affairs on the island. On the contrary, certain legends still current among the country-folk lead one to suspect that fountains once flowed on this arid rock. And more than legends. Monsignor Perrelli, in his *Antiquities of Nepenthe,* has gone into the subject with his usual thoroughness. The reader who takes the trouble to consult that work will find, in the twenty-sixth chapter of the third section dealing with the Natural Productions and Water-Supply of the island, an enumeration of no less than twelve fountains still flowing during the author's lifetime.

Some of them issued high up, in rocky clefts; others at the middle heights, among vineyards and orchards; the majority at, or near, the seashore. All of these springs, he tells us, had the following features in common: they were more or less hot, unpleasant to the taste, of fœtid odour and therefore unfit for culinary or other common uses. "But let it not be supposed," he hastens to add, "that they were worthless, inasmuch as there is no such thing as a worthless gift of Providence. Whoever argues on such fallacious lines," he says, "will stand convicted both of folly and of irreverence, seeing that it is the business of mankind, when confronted by a phenomenon which seems to mock their intelligence, humbly to ponder the evidence—to investigate causes and ascertain results." In the present case the utility of the waters, if not for cooking or drinking then for other specific purposes, had been put to the proof time out of mind, in an empirical fashion; though it was not till the reign of the Good Duke Alfred that a series of classical experiments placed our knowledge of their medicinal properties on a sound scientific footing.

In a dissertation attached to this twenty-sixth chapter—a dissertation larded with illustrative extracts from Galen, Celsus, Avicenna, Antonius Musa, Oribasius Salvus and about fifty others of the ancients who professed the healing art—Monsignor Perrelli condenses for his readers the results of these classical experiments; he hands down the names of these springs and their manifold healing virtues.

The Fountain of Saint Calogero, described as one of the most famous, was lukewarm, of ammoniacal and alkaline flavour; a glassful of it produced the most violent retchings and vomitings. Properly applied, however, the water had been found to relieve the gout, the discomforts of child-bearing, leprosy, irritation of the mucous membrane of the nose, impetigo, strabismus and ophthalmia. If the patient observed care in his diet, avoiding articles of calorific nature such as fried fish and boiled lentils, he would find himself greatly benefited by its use in the case of cornucoptic hydrocephalus, flatulence, tympanitis and varicose veins. It was useful, furthermore, as a cure for the stings of scorpions and other venomous beasts.

The so-called "Fountain of Paradise," of nitrous ingredients, spurted forth with a prodigious hissing noise, at a temperature of boiling lead, from so inaccessible a fissure in the rocks that little had been done to investigate its peculiar properties. It was held none the less to be efficacious for the distemper known as *plica polonica,* and the peasant folk, mixing its spray with acorns on which their pigs were fattened, had observed that these quadrupeds prospered vastly in health and appearance.

The Fountain of Hercules, laxative and tartaric, had proved its efficacy in cases of enlarged spleen, hare-lip, vertigo, apoplexy, cachexia, cacodoria, cacochymia senilis and chilblains. It was also considered to be a sovereign remedy for that distressing and almost universal complaint, the piles.

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The Fountain known as "La Salina," of arsenical nature, was frequented chiefly by women who found in its waters an alleviation for troubles which Monsignor Perrelli does not specify. It was recommended, moreover, as a sheep-dip.

The Fountain of the Virgin, purgative and blastopeptic, had given relief to sufferers from the quartan fever, herpes, elephantiasis, and to all persons of atrobiliary and lunatick temperament.

The so-called "Old Fountain," of sub-acidulate and *vitriolique* flavour, chalybeate and cataplastic, was renowned for removing stains from household linen. Taken in minute doses, under medical advice, it gave relief to patients afflicted with the wolfe, *noli me tangere,* crudities, Babylonian itch, globular pemphlegema, fantastical visions, koliks, asthma and affections of the heart. It also "fortifies the stomach, comforts the bowels, reduces the gallstones to sand, the sand to mud, the mud to water —water which can be passed out of the system by the usual channels."

The Fountain of Saint Vulcan, anti-blepharous and amygdaloidal, was charged with such potent minerals that a single spoonful produced a diarrhœa more distressing to witness than cholera. None the less, applied externally, it was a wondrous remedy in cases of jaundice, toothache and open wounds.

The Fountain of the Capon, sedative and scorbutic, was indicated for rheumatisms of every kind, not excluding sprained limbs, hydrophobia, lycanthropy, black choler, oppilations and procrasti-

nating catapepsia.

The Fountain known as "Spina Santa" was resorted to by all persons suffering from maladies of the alimentary canal, such as dysentery, cloven palate, follicular hepatitis, and trabulated hyperæmia of the Bivonian passage.

The Fountain of Saint Feto had, by virtue of its smell alone, applied to her nose as she lay in her coffin, raised from the dead a certain Anna da Pasto.

The Fountain popularly called "La Pisciarella" was peculiarly adapted to those ailments which are incidental to childhood and youth—to wit: chlorosis, St. Vitus' Dance, constipation, ringworm, otoötitis and other perimingeal disturbances, urticaria, moonsickness, scrofula and incontinence of urine.

Lastly, the Fountain of Saint Elias, sulphurous and saponaceous, was renowned for its calming influence upon all who suffered from abuse of lechery or alcohol, or from ingrowing toe-nails.

This concludes the list.

"Whence we may safely infer," says Monsignor Perrelli at the termination of this chapter, "that our island is second to no part of the globe in this divine gift of salutary waters. And if some should ask why certain of these springs have recently undergone a marked diminution in volume we can but answer, simply and truthfully, that their virtues are no longer in as great demand as formerly. For is it not a fact that distempers like leprosy and *plica polonica* are now almost unknown on Nepenthe? It follows that the waters adapted to

maladies such as these have performed their appointed task, so far as this island is concerned. They are doubtless flowing elsewhere, through mysterious channels of the earth, to carry their health-giving virtues into fresh regions for the saving of men's lives, to the glory of their Creator."

Thus far the learned and ingenious Monsignor Perrelli. . . .

It stands to reason that so remarkable a chapter should not have escaped the notice of the bibliographer who, as already observed, had been engaged for the last quarter of a century in elucidating the text of the old historian and enriching it with footnotes for the better understanding of modern students. In the interval of three and a half centuries many changes had taken place in the physical aspect of Nepenthe; among other things, these twelve streams of pestilential odour had ceased to flow, all save the fountain of Saint Elias; their very sites had been forgotten, though traditions of their former existence still lingered among the populace.

Searching among the archives for whatever might bear on the ancient history of these springs, Mr. Eames had accumulated abundant material for footnotes geological, hydrographical and balneotherapic. Furthermore, his personal explorations on the island had enabled him to locate the site of at least four of these old fountains, and to prove that if some of them had been covered up under the debris of landslides, the majority had disappeared

in consequence of a general desiccation of the province.

Lastly and chiefly, his investigations had brought him in contact with that manuscript, already mentioned, of the Dominican monk Father Capocchio—a manuscript in which he alighted upon a curious but troublesome literary discovery anent these very fountains. The author, a contemporary of Monsignor Perrelli, a hater of Nepenthe, a cleric of lascivious and lecherous temperament, has in this parchment preserved what he calls a "popular joke"—a saying which he declares to have been "common property of the whole country" on the subject of Nepenthe and its evil-smelling waters. It was one of those scholarly, ponderous and yet hopelessly straightforward jokes of the late Renaissance; a joke to which Monsignor Perrelli does not allude, both for reasons of local patriotism and of general decorum; some vulgar dictum, in short, connected with the name of the patron saint of Nepenthe who, he urged, was simply a local nature-god, christianized.

When the bibliographer's eagle eye first fell upon this passage he was staggered. Then, on reflection, he found himself in an awkward predicament—his natural modesty as a man contending with a no less natural and legitimate pride and desire as historian that the fruits of his labours should not be lost.

"These," he said, "are the dilemmas which confront the conscientious annotator."

What position was he to take up? Should he

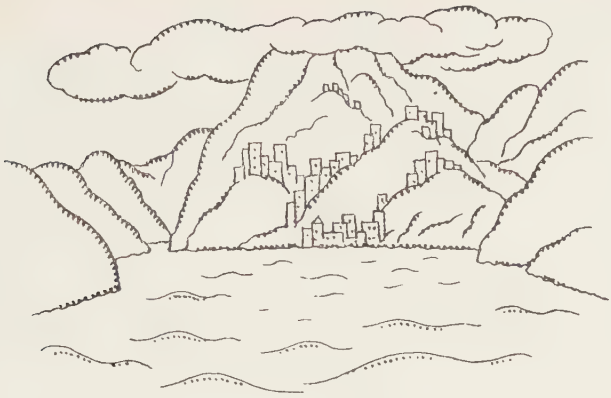
exclude the miserable joke altogether from his amended and enlarged edition of Perrelli? He did not feel himself justified in this line of conduct. Some future investigator would be sure to unearth it and get the credit for his industry. Should he re-state it in such terms as to make it palatable to refined readers, diluting its primary pungency without impairing its essential signification? He was disposed to adopt that course, but, unfortunately, all attempts at verbal manipulation failed. Good scholar as Mr. Eames was, the joke proved to be obdurate, uncompromising; vainly he wrestled with it; try as he would, it stood out naked and unashamed, refusing to be either cajoled or bullied into respectability. There was no circumventing that joke, he decided. Should he reproduce it therefore *in extenso?* Such, after mature deliberation and not without certain moral misgivings, he conceived to be his duty towards posterity. Veiled in the obscurity of a learned tongue, the joke was surreptitiously introduced into the company of a thousand chaste footnotes that could dispense with such covering devices.

Of the subsequent history of the Saint Elias Fountain, which alone still continued to flow, the bibliographer also learned much—how its fame had grown in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries till it attracted invalids from the most distant provinces, necessitating the erection of a palatial pump-room for the better accommodation of visitors; how latterly again the waters had unaccounta-

bly fallen into disfavour with the public. And this, notwithstanding the fact that in 1872 the celebrated Privy Councillor Dr. Saponaro, Director of the Montecitorio Home for Incurables, had written, at the urgent solicitation of the Nepenthe Town Authorities (who were alarmed at the decrease in their bathing-tax revenue) a pamphlet—a pamphlet which, by the way, cost them a mint of money in view of the author's deserved reputation as incorruptible scientist—a pamphlet extolling the virtues of the spring; proving, by elaborate chemical analysis, that its ingredients had not only not changed a whit since the days of Monsignor Perrelli but actually improved in quality; and concluding with the warm recommendation that they were as well adapted as ever for curing those ailments to which the island population was peculiarly liable —namely, the consequences of excessive lechery and alcohol, and the discomfort caused by ingrowing toe-nails.

The local deputy, Don Giustino Morena, had often promised his Nepenthean constituents to look into the matter and see that something was done. But he was a busy man. Up to the present he had apparently not moved a finger.

And now this fountain, the last survivor of the twelve health-giving springs, had suddenly run dry. . . .



Chapter XX

The bad news spread like wild-fire. It was regarded—for reasons which will presently appear—as a portent of gravest significance. The clergy met in unofficial but well-attended conclave to deliberate as to what attitude should be adopted towards the phenomenon, and what measures taken to allay popular apprehensions.

There was gossip, too, at the Club. Most of its members were of the *laissez faire* or even rationalistic type, and one of them—an unobtrusive Hindu who was suspected of wearing stays—went so far in his indifference as to declare that the only result of the drying-up of the fountain would be "one smell the less on Nepenthe." A small but compact minority, however, thought otherwise. Obsessed by vague forebodings, they found an able and eloquent interpreter of their fears in the Commissioner who, rather redder in the face than usual, strode fussily up and down the premises, tugging at his

disreputable briar pipe, drinking whisky with anybody who cared to pay for it, and declaring to all and sundry that something must be done. It was his panacea—his unvarying formula for every emergency, scandalous or otherwise. Something must be done, he avowed. And from the card-table came two approving echoes—the voices of Mr. Muhlen and Signor Malipizzo, who did not care tuppence about the fountain but never lost an opportunity of expressing their public approval of Mr. Parker's words and actions.

Something must be done and that soon, for in a few brief hours an atmosphere of gloom, a sense of impending calamity, had begun to hover over the sunny island. The natives called to mind, with consternation, that only once within the memory of their ancestors had the fountain behaved after this fashion. It was on the eve of that great volcanic outbreak on the mainland which, by a deadly shower of ashes destroyed their crops and impoverished them to such an extent that for three consecutive months they could barely afford the most unnecessary luxuries of life. They opined with some show of reason that the little streamlet had been tempted by ancient and obscure bonds of sympathy to forsake its old home and creep away, under leagues of shimmering sea, towards the fiery heart of the volcano; there to undergo some alchemic process of readjustment, some ordeal, some torrid nuptial rite which would result in the birth of a flaming monster and the ruin of mankind.

The terrace was crowded with folk; all eyes were turned towards the distant fire-mountain. But the volcano had never looked so placid, so harmless, so attractive; its shapely flanks suffused with the crimson light of evening, while wreaths of violet vapour ascended, in lazy intermittent spirals, from the cone. They rose into the zenith playfully, one after the other, as though the volcano were desirous of drawing attention to its pretty manners, and were wafted onwards, in delicate wisps of smoke, by the persistent south wind. The clergy now began to appear in goodly numbers upon the scene. They were in the best of humours and more ready than usual, it seemed, to take part in any conversation which might be going on. It had been decided, during their informal gathering, that the apprehensions of the faithful could not be better allayed at this preliminary stage than by a mild demonstration of this kind. Appearances were everything; so they had concluded, not for the first time. And it was precisely then that the simple-minded *parroco,* surrounded by a knot of devout believers, pointed to the playful cloudlets of smoke as they issued from the mouth of the crater, and made a remark which he thought not only cheerful and apposite, but calculated to calm the minds of his hearers. He said that no rosy schoolboy, smoking his first cigarette, ever looked more innocent. An ominous, fateful speech! Yet such was his holy simplicity that he failed to realize its import. He failed to perceive how unauspicious the metaphor

had been till Don Francesco, in a whisper, pointed out that appearances are apt to be deceptive and, alluding to certain experiences of his own at the tender age of six years, affirmed that the smoking of a first cigarette, for all its seeming harmlessness, is liable to be followed by something in the nature of a cataclysm.

There was worse to come. For while the sun yet lingered on the horizon news of further portents came thick and fast. A plum tree belonging to a farmer of good standing had unaccountably lost all its leaves. The Duchess arrived in a state of unusual trepidation, declaring that the tortoise-shell of her lorgnette gave forth a crackling sound. She appealed to Don Francesco to explain the meaning of this extraordinary circumstance; it crackled most distinctly, she declared. Not far from the little bay where only yesterday the streamlet of Saint Elias still trickled into the sea, a fisherman had caught a one-eyed lamprey—a beast, unquestionably, of ill repute. The bibliographer, strolling about with Denis, recollected that his fox-terrier that very morning had been violently sick. He seemed to attach no great importance to the affair; all the same, he said, it was rather queer; dogs are not like that; now, if it had been Keith. . . . The baby of the principal grocer had tumbled downstairs and thereupon proceeded to swallow eight of its elder brother's marbles which had been carelessly left on the floor—without experiencing, so far as could be ascertained, any appreciable in-

jury. A mysterious disease, known as the scabies, had broken out among the Russian apostles. The yacht of the American millionaire, Mr. van Koppen, arrived that day; there was nothing startling in this since he visited the island year after year at the same season; but why should she collide with a fishing-boat at the moment of anchoring?

And from the Old Town came news of a portentous fowl which had suddenly assumed the plumage of the male sex. It was a hen renowned, hitherto, for her temperate and normal habits and, as it happened, known by sight to the local parish priest, who, horrified at the transformation of the feathered monster and mindful of the Papal Bull *ne nimis noceant nobis* which enjoins upon Christians the duty of destroying all unnatural productions however generated, incontinently ordered it to be put out of the way. But the destruction of this androgyne proved an arduous task. It was reported that the creature fought for its life with the energy of a demon, crowing vigorously the while and laying, in the very act of death, an egg—an egg of spheroidal form, bluish in colour, and apparently hard-boiled—an egg which the Chief Medical Officer of Health had no great difficulty in recognizing as that of a cockatrice.

In view of these and other sinister occurrences it is not surprising that a sense of insecurity should have fallen upon the more credulous section of the natives. Even sceptical persons thought it rather provoking on the part of Providence, or whoever

managed these things, that the disquieting of men's minds should take place during this particular fortnight, the most important of the whole year, midway between the great feasts of Saint Dodekanus and Saint Eulalia when the island was crammed with visitors.

And there followed late at night yet another surprise. Mr. Parker had been called away from his duties at the Club in hot haste by the news that his lady was seriously ill. A few days earlier she had been stung on the lip by a mosquito; no further attention was paid to the incident, though the disagreeable south wind provoked a rise in temperature and some discomfort. On this afternoon, however, her face had suddenly begun to assume strange tints and to swell in wondrous fashion. It was now already enlarged to twice its natural size and altogether—in the words of the physician who had been summoned to her villa—"a thing to see."

It had always been a thing to see. So, at least, said those who were privileged to know. There were tropical strains in her blood—strains from some flowery land in the Caribbean Sea—strains which refused to mingle in harmonious fashion with the white elements in her ancestry. She was neither lovely nor lovable, and it was regarded as a kindly dispensation of Heaven that some malformation of the lower limbs kept her confined to her boudoir, where no visitors ever called save a few misguided new-comers to the island who were unaware of her idiosyncrasies. These idiosyncrasies, due to the

enforced inactivity of her feet, took the form of a grotesque activity of the tongue. Her infirmity preventing her from learning how things really stood, she let her phantasy run riot on the occasional reports which reached the villa; and the phantasy, nourished by lack of physical exercise, indulged in a love of scandal-mongering which bordered, and sometimes trespassed, on the pathological. She distilled scandal from every pore, and in such liberal quantities that even the smiling and good-natured Don Francesco once spoke of her as "the serpent in the Paradise." But perhaps he only said that because Madame Parker was not over-fond of him—his rival the *parroco* being her friend and confessor.

Such being the case, the prospect of her possible demise was received with unconcern and even relief by all save a notable number of tradesmen who prayed fervently for her health because the lady, presuming on her connection with the official representative of the friendly state of Nicaragua, had contrived to owe them considerable sums of money. Knowing the Commissioner as they did, these victims feared that they would never be able to collect their due in the event of her death. Hence their prayers for her speedy recovery.

What would that gentleman do without her? For it was his redeeming feature that he felt, or professed to feel, affection for this graceless harridan who was the only person on earth that believed, or professed to believe, in the integrity of his motives. It is to be presumed that they saw through each

other perfectly; she, at least, may well have appraised him at his true value. She must have known him for a dishonest fool. Yet this principle of mutual attachment was never relinquished. Wiser than her stepbrother, she knew that a house divided against itself must fall; she therefore approved, forcefully if without conviction, of his every word and deed. Such approval did him good. It created a fictitious self-esteem. And this was really rather unfortunate, since self-esteem, by giving him a sense of importance and consequence in the world, rendered him a good deal more objectionable to his fellow-creatures than he need have been.

Meanwhile she lingered on, and a small group of enquirers were gathered round the physician who was returning late at night from his third visit. The moralists among them saw the finger of God in the fact that her mouth, out of which had proceeded so much harm to strong men and women, should now be sealed by one of the frailest of His creatures. The doctor shrugged his shoulders at this kind of talk. He was no moralizer; he was a true southerner, an æsthete—one of those who could appreciate the subtle beauty of a skin disease. He waxed discursive on the subject; said that the lady's face reminded him of the rainbow in a certain picture by a local genius; avowed that there were moments when even a doctor's hard life had its compensations, and that this was one of them.

His enthusiasm carried the audience off their feet. It converted the sternest preachers into artists.

They forgot to talk about moral lessons. All congratulated the good Æsculapius on his choice of the medical profession as a career and his luck in beholding a spectacle such as this; especially when he added, with glowing eloquence, that it was astonishing how so small an insect, a mere mosquito, should be able to produce an eruption of this magnitude and in colours, moreover, which would have made Titian or Peter Paul Rubens burst with envy.

Chapter XXI

Decidedly, things were happening, as Mr. Heard would have said.

Strange to say that gentleman himself was probably the only person on Nepenthe who still remained in ignorance of all these præternatural occurrences. In the early morning, after admiring the sea overhung by a cloudless sky and once more thanking the Duchess in his heart for such a delightful residence when he might have been boxed up in some stuffy bedroom, he descended to the beach for his morning bathe. Such was his custom. The swim did him good, it freshened him up.

Then back to breakfast and a busy morning's work, to settle up arrears of correspondence. He wrote to various friends in England; he wrote a long letter—the third since his arrival— to his mother, telling her of all such things as might interest her; a nice gossipy letter, full of information about the entertainments of the foreigners on

Nepenthe, about the obliging natives, the Russian colony, the persistent sirocco, his own domestic life, his improved health. Much as he liked the place and people, he said, he expected to be leaving in a week or so. He concluded with two pages describing his last visit to his cousin. She was rather poorly or troubled in mind, he thought; he would see her again ere long.

And that reminded him—he would write to Mrs. Meadows as well. He did so, enquiring after her health, asking whether he could be of any assistance, and promising to call again shortly. "Rather a formal epistle," he concluded, on reading it through. He was unable to force the note; he could never write or talk otherwise than he felt, and this cousin, after all, was rather remote, self-centred, and difficult of comprehension. "It must go as it is," he decided. "To be quite frank, she's not exactly encouraging either. Asks such queer questions. What on earth did she mean by that conundrum about illegitimacy, I wonder?"

Then luncheon; then a long sleep till tea-time. Everyone slept at this hour during the days of sirocco-heat. What else was there to do? He had already learned to look forward to that calm post-prandial hour of slumber. One owes something to oneself, *n'est-ce pas?* as Muhlen had said.

On waking he bethought him of an invitation to tea with Madame Steynlin. He would have listened gladly to her music and her instructive and charitable talk about Nepenthe and its inhabitants. But

he was afraid of meeting Russians there. The lady seemed to be specializing in Muscovites just then, and Mr. Heard was not in the Russian mood. He would take what he called "a day off" from social duties.

Slipping his field-glasses into his pocket, he rambled upwards by now familiar paths, past white farmhouses nestling in a riot of greenery, till he reached the barer regions. The vines were more sparsely cultivated here, and soon all trace of human handicraft was at an end. He found himself on a little plateau of volcanic cinders and lava-blocks. The spare grasses and flowers that grew between fuliginous masses of stone were already losing their bright enamel under the withering heat; a peculiar odour, acrid but stimulating to the nostrils, rose from the parched ground. Here he rested awhile. He scanned the landscape through his glasses—a wine-coloured sea at his feet, flecked with sailing boats innumerable; confronting him the volcano whose playful antics were even then attracting the attention of a crowded Piazza. And his eye roved along the serrated contours of the mainland, its undulating shore-line, its distant peaks throbbing in the sunset-glow; they rested upon many villages, coral-tinted specks of light, so far away they seemed to belong to another world. It was a pleasure to breathe on these aerial heights, surrounded by sky and sea; to survey the world as a bird might survey it. Like floating in air. . . .

He sat and smoked and pondered. He tried to

get himself into perspective. "I must straighten myself out," he thought. Assuredly it was a restful place, this Nepenthe, abounding in kindly people; his affection for it grew with every day. Rest without; but where was that old rest within, that sense of plain tasks plainly to be performed, of tangible duty? Whither had it gone? Alien influences were at work upon him. Something new had insinuated itself into his blood, some demon of doubt and disquiet which threatened his old-established conceptions. Whence came it? The effect of changed environment—new friends, new food, new habits? The unaccustomed leisure which gave him, for the first time, a chance of thinking about non-professional matters? The south wind acting on his still weakened health? All these together? Or had he reached an epoch in his development, the termination of one of those definite life-periods when all men worthy of the name pass through some cleansing process of spiritual desquamation, and slip their outworn weeds of thought and feeling?

Whatever it was he seemed to be no longer his own master, as in former days. Fate had caused his feet to stray towards something new—something alarming. He was poised, as it were on the brink of a gulf. Or rather, it was as if that old mind of his, like a boat sailing hitherto briskly before the wind, had suddenly encountered a bank of calm, of utter and ominous calm; it was a thing spellbound; a toy of circumstances beyond human control. The canvas hung in the stagnant air. From

which quarter would the quickening breeze arrive? Whither would it bear him?

And his glance fell upon a slender coquettish vessel, a newcomer, lying in the sunny harbour under the cliff. He knew it from hearsay. It was the *Flutterby,* van Koppen's yacht. He recollected all he had ever heard about the millionaire; he tried to conjure up some idea of his features and habits from gossip overheard at odd moments.

This man, he concluded, must be intelligent beyond ordinary standards. It would be worth while making his acquaintance. America is notoriously the land of youthful precocity. But it is not every American who, as a stripling of fourteen summers, puzzling in callow boyish perplexity upon the thousand ills that afflict mankind and burning with desire for their betterment, makes a discovery in Malthusian methods destined to convulse the trade and the social life of a continent. Not everybody is like young Koppen—he attached a van to his name on reaching his seventy-fifth million—who, possessed at that time of barely three dollars in the world and not even the shadow of a moustache, had both the wit to realize the hygienic importance of a certain type of goods and the pertinacity to insist on cheapening their price, in the interests of public health, to such an extent that—to quote from subsequent advertisements—they should be "within reach of the humblest home." It is not everybody—no, not every American—who, after revolutionizing the technique of manufacture and

shattering the Paris monopoly, dares boldly to advertise the improved articles across the length and breadth of the land, and to thrust his commodity upon a reluctant market in the teeth of popular prejudice and commercial rivalry. Van Koppen had done all this. And it was noted that he had done it without ever for a moment losing sight of his dual aim—mercantile and philanthropic; for if he was a humanitarian by natural disposition, he became what he called "a tradesman by force of circumstance"—and not a bad tradesman, either. He had done all this and more. Unlike most self-made men who remain yoked like oxen to their sordid affairs (in harness, they aptly call it) he had been shrewd enough to retire from business in the heyday of his age, on a relatively modest competence of fifteen million dollars a year. He was spending his time at present in the gratification of personal whims, and leaving the remaining millions to be picked up by whoever cared to take the trouble. Manifestly an unusual type of millionaire—this man who had lived down half a century of obloquy and was now hailed, in well-informed circles, as the saviour of his country.

Nor was this all. Van Koppen was described as a brisk, genial, talkative old fellow, rather fat, with a clear complexion, sound teeth, scrubby grey beard, a twang barely sufficient to authenticate his transatlantic descent, and the digestion of a boa-constrictor. He was tremendously fond of buttered tea-cakes—so the Duchess said; a man who, in the

words of Madame Steynlin, "really appreciated good music" and who as the *parroco* never ceased to declare could be relied on to give a handsome contribution towards the funds for supporting the poor and repairing a decrepit parish organ. (The parish poor were never in such dire distress, the parish organ never so hopelessly deranged, as during that annual week when the *Flutterby* rode at anchor.)

In fact there was no doubt about it: van Koppen had the gift of making himself beloved. But nobody's company was more markedly to his taste than that of Count Caloveglia. The two old men spent hours together in Caloveglia's shady courtyard, eating candied fruits, sipping home-made liqueurs of peaches or mountain-herbs and talking —ever talking. Between them there existed some strong and strange bond of friendship or interest. Speculation was rife as to its origin, its meaning, its end.

What was all the talk about?

Andrea, the devoted retainer, however artfully approached on the subject, was ambiguous to a distressing degree. It was understood, none the less, that Count Caloveglia was perhaps of use to the other in the accumulation of classical relics which —the Italian Government forbidding the export of antique works of art—were smuggled at nighttime on board the *Flutterby* to be incorporated in a magnificent museum somewhere out West, a museum which was destined to be presented by van Koppen as a gift to the great American people.

Again, it might be inferred that these two elderly gentlemen, choice representatives of two conflicting civilizations, widely experienced and profoundly versed, each in his own way, in the knowledge of mankind, took a sincere and childlike pleasure in one another's society, going over past times and anxious, to the very end of life, to add something fresh to their store of learning.

Both these explanations were sufficiently plausible to be straightway dismissed by the majority as inadequate to account for the phenomenon. They inclined, rather, to adopt an alternative and alluring theory propounded by the Commissioner's lady. This theory laid it down that the American was bargaining for the Count's daughter, a pretty girl whom the old ruffian had shut up in a convent somewhere in anticipation of the day when a purchaser, rich enough to content his inordinate lust of gold, should present himself. Van Koppen was that purchaser. They had now been haggling, she said, for two or three years; a *dénouement* might be expected at any moment. If the Count's avarice could be appeased, the unhappy child might expect to find herself, with as little delay as possible, an inmate of the floating harem on board the *Flutterby*.

No visitor was safe from her lively tongue, and alas, certain little details, insignificant in themselves, gave ground for the ungenerous hypothesis that van Koppen, like all the rest of them, had his cloven hoof. There was the usual "dark side" to this otherwise charming and profitable stranger, the usual

mystery, the usual fly in the ointment. In the first place it was a singular fact, much commented on, that nobody had ever been invited on board the yacht. That alone was suspicious. *If you want to get anything out of old Koppen*—so ran a local saying—*DON'T propose a visit to the Flutterby.* More curious still was the circumstance that nobody, save the owner and certain bearded venerables of the crew, had ever been known to land on the island. How about the other passengers? Who were they? The millionaire never so much as mentioned their existence. It was surmised, accordingly, that he voyaged over the seas with a bevy of light-hearted nymphs; a disreputable mode of conduct for a man of his advanced years, and all the more aggravating to other people since, like a crafty and jealous old sultan, he screened them from public view. Impropriety could be overlooked—it could pass, where a millionaire was concerned, under the heading of unconventionality; but such glaring selfishness might end in being fatal to his reputation.

Confirmatory evidence of this scandalous state of affairs was obtained, one sunny morning, in the most unexpected fashion. A fisherman named Luigi, paddling about the stern of the *Flutterby* where, in consequence of the kitchen refuse thrown overboard, marine beasts of every shape and kind were wont to congregate, cast down his spear at what looked like a splendid cærulean flat-fish of uncommon size and brilliance. The creature shivered and collapsed at that contact in the most unnatural,

unfishlike manner; and Luigi drew up, to his amazement, a fragment of a lady's dress—to wit, a short length of sky-blue *crêpe de Chine*. Bitterly disappointed, he nevertheless took the matter with characteristic southern philosophy. "This will do for my little Annarella," he decided. And doubtless the child, arrayed in these celestial tints, would have been the envy of all her girl companions at the next festival of the patron saint but for the fact that Mr. Freddy Parker was strolling on the beach at the very moment of the man's return to land. By a piece of rare good luck, as he himself phrased it, his eyes fell upon the dripping fabric; by a stroke of intuition not rare but unique, he divined its worth as a sociological document. Promising the man a reasonable sum of money (the Commissioner happened to have no loose change in his pocket just then) he carried the incriminating morsel in triumph to the Residency, where it was displayed by his lady, to all and sundry, in corroboration of her theory.

"That settles it," he used to say. "Unless indeed he dresses up his cabin-boy as a girl, and in that case . . ."

Mr. Heard, reposing on the rough pumiceous ground with his eye fixed upon the naughty *Flutter-by* whose virginal whiteness, with declining day, had assumed a tell-tale crimson blush, pieced together these and sundry other little bits of information. They made him more than usually thoughtful; they chimed in with his momentary mood of

self-analysis.

One thing was dead certain. To circumnavigate the globe in the arms of a dozen chorus-girls was not his ideal. He was not built on those lines. He purposed, God willing, to spend the evening of his days in another and more respectable manner. A vision arose before his imagination—a vision of a peaceful homestead among the green lanes of England, where he would lead a life of study and of kindly, unostentatious acts, with family and friends; old friends of College days, and London days, and African days; new friends from among the rising generation—straightforward and decent-minded youngsters, whom he would take to his heart like a father.

Why could not van Koppen see the beauty of such dreamings?

And yet, he argued, if the man does seclude them in this fashion—supposing they really exist—who can blame him? No woman is safe on Nepenthe with persons like Muhlen about. From chance meetings in the street, from stray conversations overheard, he had been led to take an unreasoning dislike to this foreigner, whose attitude towards the gentle sex struck him as that of a cur. Muhlen, if the yacht were his, would flaunt these ladies about the streets. The American, in keeping them secluded on board, betrayed a sense of shame, almost of delicacy; a sense of his obligations towards society which, so far as it went, was rather a laudable trait of character than otherwise.

And then—the difference between himself and the millionaire in life, training, antecedents! A career such as van Koppen's called for qualities different, often actually antagonistic, to his own. You could not possibly expect to find in a successful American merchant those features which go to form a successful English ecclesiastic. Certain human attributes were mutually exclusive—avarice and generosity, for instance; others no doubt mysteriously but inextricably intertwined. A man was an individual; he could not be divided or taken to pieces; he could not be expected to possess virtues incompatible with the rest of his mental equipment, however desirable such virtues might be. Who knows? Van Koppen's doubtful acts might be an unavoidable expression of his personality, an integral part of that nature under whose ferocious stimulus he had climbed to his present enviable position. And Mr. Heard was both shocked and amused to reflect that but for the co-operation of certain coarse organic impulses to which these Nepenthe legends testified, the millionaire might never have been able to acquire the proud title of "Saviour of his Country."

"That's queer," he mused. "It never struck me before. Shows how careful one must be. Dear me! Perhaps the ladies have inevitable organic impulses of a corresponding kind. Decidedly queer. H'm. Ha. Now I wonder. . . . And perhaps, if the truth were known, these young persons are having quite a good time of it——"

He paused abruptly in his reflections. He had caught himself in the act; in the very act of condoning vice. Mr. Thomas Heard was seriously concerned.

Something was wrong, he concluded. He would never have argued on similar lines a short time ago. This downright sympathy with sinners, what did it portend? Did he betray a lapse from his old-established principles, a waning of his respect for traditional morality? Was he becoming a sinner himself?

Thomas—the doubting apostle. He wondered whether there was anything in a name.

Then he called to mind how he had approved—yes, almost approved—of Don Francesco's deplorable act of familiarity towards the little serving maid. An absurdly small matter, but symptomatic. Things like that had happened in Africa lately. He remembered various instances where he had intervened on behalf of the natives, despite the murmured protests of the missionaries. They were such laughing, good-natured animals—so fine and healthy! What was it, this excessive love of erring humanity, and whither trending? Mr. Heard began to vex his soul, to stray about in a maze of doubts. It was so miserably complex, this old, old problem of right and wrong; so unreasonably many-sided. Anon, he pulled himself together with characteristic bluntness.

"The whole question," he concluded, "is plain as a pikestaff. Am I becoming more of a Christian, or less?"

As though to learn an answer to his riddle he gazed from his eyrie over the wide horizon, upon leagues of sea rising upwards to blend their essence, under the magic touch of evening, with the purple dome overhead.

The elements, as is their wont upon such occasions, gave forth no clear reply.

None the less, while the moist south wind, shorn of the sting of midday, relaxed his pores and passed over his cheek like a warm caress, there exhaled from those limitless spaces a sense of joyous amplitude—of freedom and exhilaration.

Chapter XXII

And now, in the sunlit hour of dawn, he was bathing again. An excellent habit. It did him good, this physical contact with nature. Africa had weakened his constitution. Nepenthe made him feel younger once more—capable of fun and mischief. The muscles were acquiring a fresh tone, that old zest of life was coming back to him. His health, without a shadow of doubt, had greatly improved.

While disporting himself in amphibious joy among the tepid waves he seemed to cast off that sense of unease which had pursued him of late. It was good to inhale the harsh salty savour—to submit himself to these calming voices—to float, like a careless Leviathan, in the blue immensity; good to be alive, simply alive.

Another hot and clammy day was in store for the island. No matter. This sirocco, of which older inhabitants might well complain, had so far exerted

no baleful influence upon him. Quite the reverse. Under its tender moistening touch his frame, desiccated in the tropics, seemed to open out, even as a withered flower uncloses its petals in water. In Africa all his thoughts and energies had been concentrated upon a single point. Here he expanded. New interests, new sensations, seemed to lie in wait for him. Never had he felt so alert, so responsive to spiritual impressions, so appreciative of natural beauty.

Lying in motionless ecstasy on the buoyant element he watched the mists of morning as they soared into the air. Reluctantly, with imperceptible movement, they detached themselves from their watery home; then clambered aloft in spectral companies, drawn skyward, as by some beckoning hand, under the stealthy compulsion of the sun. They crept against the tawny precipices, clinging to their pinnacles like shreds of pallid gauze, and nestling demurely among dank clefts where something of the mystery of night still lingered. It was a procession of dainty shapes wreathing themselves into gracious attitudes; mounting—ever mounting. As he beheld their filmy draperies that swayed phantom-like among the crags overhead, he understood those pagan minds of olden days for whom such wavering exhalations were none other than sea-nymphs, Atlantides, offspring of some mild-eyed god of Ocean rising to greet their playfellows, the Oreads, on the hills.

The wildest stretch of Nepenthe coast-line lay

before him. Its profile suggested not so much the operation of terrestrial forces as a convulsed and calcined lunar landscape—the handiwork of some demon in delirium. Gazing landwards, nothing met his eye save jagged precipices of fearful height, tormented rifts and gulleys scorched by fires of old into fantastic shapes, and descending confusedly to where the water slept in monster-haunted caverns.

Not a sign of humanity was visible save one white villa, far away. It was perched on a promontory of heliotrope-tinted trachyte; struck by the morning beams it flashed and glowed like a jewel in the sunshine. He knew the place, Madame Steynlin's abode. The sight of it reminded him of a promise to attend her picnic next week; all Nepenthe would be invited, after the feast of Saint Eulalia. And hard by the shore, at its foot, he discerned certain minute scarlet specks.

What could they be?

Why, of course! They were recognizable, even at this distance, as the blouses of the Sacred Sixty-three, who frequented this somewhat public spot for bathing purposes, blandly indifferent, or resigned, to the gaze of inquisitive onlookers. Mr. Heard, among others, had witnessed their aquatic diversions.

The Messiah was hindered by age and growing infirmities from taking part in the proceedings; moreover, he had been sickening lately, it was said, for some new Revelation—a Revelation of which the island was to become cognizant that very

morning. But others of the Muscovite band were fond of congregating at this spot and hour for their lustral summer rites—white-skinned lads and lassies, matrons and reverent elders, all in a state of Adamitic nudity, splashing about the water of this sunny cove, devouring raw fish and crabs after the manner of the fabled Ichthyophagi, laughing, kissing, saying nice things about God, and combing out each other's long tow-coloured hair. Madame Steynlin, a spectator by necessity if not deliberate choice, of these patriarchal frolics, disdained to controvert certain frivolous folk who resorted to the same beach to gratify a morbid curiosity, under the pretext that it was a delectable entertainment and one of the sights of Nepenthe. She disdained, nowadays. It had not ever been thus. Things were different before Peter the Great came upon the scene. In those unregenerate times her Lutheran upbringing condemned, in no measured terms, this frank exhibition of animal nature. A warm friendship with the good-looking apostle had now opened her eyes to the mystic sense of what went on. Earthly love had given an unearthly tinge to her mind. The veil had fallen; she saw through external appearances into the Symbolic Beyond. Deeply penetrated of its inner meaning, she would say that the spectacle called up visions of the Age of Innocence, when the world was young. . . .

An elegant rowing-boat suddenly swept into Mr. Heard's field of vision. It had approached from round the entrance of the small bay and was al-

ready within a few yards ere he caught sight of it. He dived skilfully, and on returning to the surface beheld Mr. Keith smiling upon him, with owlish benevolence, through his spectacles.

"How pretty you look," he said. "Just like a mermaid that's lost its tail."

"You flatter me!"

"Not at all. Climb in and I'll take you for a row."

"Hadn't I better get some clothes on?"

"As you please. We can take you off that boulder if you want to dress."

"You're very kind."

Kind indeed. To admit a friend into one of his yachts or rowing-boats was an act of rare self-sacrifice on the part of Mr. Keith, who maintained that no vessel, not even an Atlantic liner, was large enough for more than one passenger.

"You are comfortable in here," the bishop remarked, as he presently stepped on board and looked around him. "Cleopatra's barge must have been something like this."

"There will be no breeze worth talking about all day. We must row."

An awning of red silk screened off the rays of the sun; the appointments of the small boat—the polished wood of rare texture, morocco leather cushions, and elaborate fittings—bespoke the taste or at least the income of a Sybarite. A grizzly brown sailor and his curly-pated son were the oarsmen; in the stern sat a couple of Keith's attendants, whom Mr. Heard might have mistaken for two

Greek genii but for the fact that between them lay an enormous and hideously modern receptacle of wickerwork which impaired the illusion. It troubled the bishop, both by reason of its incongruity and because he could not divine what its purport might be, till Keith solved the mystery by saying:

"I thought I would like to see for myself about this fountain of Saint Elias and, incidentally, enjoy a little al fresco luncheon by the shore. Now I wonder whether there will be enough food for both of us in the basket?"

"That thing? Dear me. I thought it might contain a cottage piano. What fountain?"

"You haven't heard anything? Nothing at all?"

He outlined the events of the preceeding day.

"What?" he continued. "They didn't even tell you about Miss Wilberforce? Well, whether she thought it was her birthday, or whether all these omens upset her nerves——Oh, the usual thing, only rather more so. Decidedly more so. It was late at night, you see, and she insisted on singing 'Auld Lang Syne,' and even on translating it, for the benefit of the constable who arrested her, into her own particular brand of Italian. In fact, there was a good deal of trouble, till somebody let down a blanket from a window. It happened to be a new policeman unaccustomed to her ways, and he has had a bad shock. His wife complained to the judge, who sent round word to me this morning that she was in the lock-up."

"In prison. An English lady!"

"It is not the first time by any means. But I feel exactly as you do about it. I've bailed her out, and stopped his mouth with a fifty franc note. Please keep this between ourselves."

Mr. Heard was not pleased to learn this incident. It seemed a discordant note on Nepenthe. He observed:

"Miss Wilberforce apparently can be relied upon to create a diversion of a scandalous nature. I wish I could do something to help such a poor creature."

"The dear lady! I don't know what we should do without her. By the way, have you seen Denis lately? We must be friendly to that young fellow, Heard. I don't think he is altogether happy in this clear pagan light. He seems to be oppressed about something. What do you make of him?"

"Of Denis? Nothing at all."

"You interest me."

"How so?"

"Because your values appear to be perverted. Your heart remains dead to Denis, but goes out to a worthless and incurable drunkard. The one is supremely happy, the other plainly troubled in mind. It leaves you cold. How do you explain it?"

Mr. Heard began to wonder. Were his values really vitiated? Had he done anything to justify self-reproach? He remembered meeting Denis lately, in a fit of dejection, as it seemed; they had passed each other with a few words of greeting. Perhaps he might have been a little more friendly. Well, he

would atone for it on the next occasion. He asked:

"Has he no relations?"

"A mother, at present in Florence. There have been misunderstandings, I suspect. He has probably found her out, like he found out our Duchess; like he will find out both you and me, if we give him the chance. Meanwhile he gropes about in a wistful fashion, trying to carve out a scheme of life for himself and to learn something from all of us. What can a person of that kind have in common with a mother of any kind?"

"Everything," said Mr. Heard enthusiastically.

"Nothing at all. You are thinking of your own mother. You forget that you never see her. Any son can live with any mother under those conditions. The fact remains: nobody can misunderstand a boy like his own mother. Look around you, and see if it is not true! Honour thy father and mother. Perhaps. But we must civilize our mothers before we can expect any rational companionship between them and their sons. Girls are different. They are more cynical and less idealistic, they can put up with mothers, they can laugh at them. I am speaking in a general way. Of course there are shining exceptions. Mothers at present can bring children into the world, but this performance is apt to mark the end of their capacities. They can't even attend to the elementary animal requirements of their offspring. It is quite surprising how many children survive in spite of their mothers. Ask any doctor."

"If that is the case there must be something wrong with our social system. You may be sure that the female cat or canary bird is just as efficient in her department as the male in his. Speaking from my own experience among the London poor, I should say that the father is often a mere parasite on his wife and children——"

"We may both of us be right. But I wish you would take Denis in hand a little. Will you? Perhaps you misread his character. He may be afraid of you."

"Have you any particular reason——"

"I don't like his looks. There is something tragic about him lately."

Mr. Heard was slightly nettled. After all, he was not on Nepenthe for the purpose of doling out consolations to melancholy undergraduates.

"I should be sorry to think myself singled out for his distrust," he replied. "At the same time, I don't notice that he has much to say to certain other people—to the Commissioner, for instance, or to Mr. Muhlen."

"Muhlen? He is quite right to leave Muhlen alone. Quite right. It proves his intuition. I have learnt all about that man. A beastly character. He has a bad record. Lives on blackmail and women. His real name is Retlow."

And Mr. Keith lit a cigar, as though to dismiss the subject.

"Retlow, you say? That's queer."

The name sounded familiar to the bishop. Where

had he heard it before? He racked his memory. Where could it have been? Retlow. . . . It was not a common name. Long ago, obviously. Where?

In African days, or earlier?

His searchings were interrupted by the voice of the old boatman who, relinquishing an oar, pointed to a swart precipice near at hand and said in tolerable English (the older generation of natives all spoke English—their children were learning Russian):

"The suicides' rock, gentlemens. Ah! Many is the poor Christian I have pick up there. He throw down hiself. Him dead. Often in small pieces. Here blood. Here brain. Here leg and boot. Here finger. Ah! The poor Christian. That so, gentlemens."

The bishop scanned with a shudder this frowning cliff of basalt, and turned to address his companion.

"Do people really throw themselves over here?"

"Very few. Not more than three or four in a season, I'm told. The local suicides, as a rule, are not as spectacular as they might be considering the landscape. They shoot themselves or take poison, which shows a certain consideration for other people. It is not a pleasant job, you know, to row to this remote spot and scramble about the cliff at the risk of a broken neck, collecting shattered fragments of humanity into a potato sack."

"Not at all pleasant!"

"As compared with England," Keith pursued, "life here is intense, palpitating, dramatic—a kind of blood-curdling farce full of irresponsible crimes

and improbable consequences. The soil is saturated with blood. People are always killing themselves or each other for motives which, to an Englishman, are altogether outside the range of comprehensibility. Shall I tell you about one of our most interesting cases? I happened to be on the island at the time. There was a young fellow here—an agreeable young fellow—an artist; he was rich; he took a villa, and painted. We all liked him. Then, by degrees, he became secretive and moody. Said he was studying mechanics. He told me himself that much as he liked landscape painting he thought an artist—a real artist, he said—ought to be versed in ancillary sciences; in fortification, wood-carving, architecture, and so on. Leonardo da Vinci, you know. Well, one day they could not get into his bedroom. They broke open his door and discovered that he had constructed a perfectly-formed guillotine; the knife had fallen; his head lay on one side and his body on the other. You may well be surprised. I went carefully into that case. He was in the best of health, with a creditable artistic record behind him. He had no troubles, financial or domestic."

"Then what on earth——?"

"The scenery of Nepenthe. It got on his nerves; it unstrung him. Does that surprise you too? Don't you feel its effect upon yourself? The bland winds, the sea shining in velvety depths as though filled with some electric fluid, the riot of vegetation, these extravagant cliffs that change colour with every

hour of the day? Look at that peak yonder—is it not almost transparent, like some crystal of amethyst? This coastline alone—the sheer effrontery of its mineral charm—might affect some natures to such an extent as to dislocate their stability. Northern minds seem to become fluid here, impressionable, unstable, unbalanced—what you please. There is something in the brightness of this spot which decomposes their old particles and arranges them into fresh and unexpected patterns. That is what people mean when they say that they 'discover themselves' here. You discover a mechanism, you know, when you take it to pieces. You catch my meaning?"

"I catch it."

He nodded. He understood perfectly. Some analogous process was going on within him at that moment. He, too, was discovering himself.

"Have you discovered yourself, Keith?"

"Yes, by other methods, elsewhere. I am only here for a short time in the spring and another ten days in September. That is hardly enough, even supposing I were the sort of person to be accessible to these externals. I have passed that stage. I am too old, too unemotional. I prefer devouring a partridge *en casserole* or listening to your conversation ("listening to my conversation!" thought Mr. Heard) to all the scenery in the world. But I watch other people; I make it my business to study their condition; I put myself in their places. *Je constate,* as the French say. To them, the landscape of Nepenthe is alive, often malignantly alive.

They do what you cannot so effectually do in the North; they humanize it, identifying its various aspects with their own moods, its features with their own traditions."

Mr. Heard thought of those tremulous mists he had seen only an hour ago—the daughters of old Ocean.

"They humanize it," he echoed. "The mythopoetic faculty!"

"Perhaps this capacity of southern scenery to bear a mortal interpretation accounts for the anthropomorphic deities of classical days. I often think it does. Even we moderns are unaccountably moved by its varying facets which act sometimes as an aphrodisiac, and sometimes by their very perfection, their discouraging spell, their insolent beauty, suggest the hopelessness of all human endeavour. . . . Denis! I should think him capable of anything, just now. Do you imagine a person like this could possibly remain insensible to the beguiling influence of these surroundings?"

"I never thought about him."

"Really? You interest me, Heard. If you deny the susceptibility of a temperament like his, you deny the whole operation of externals upon character and action. You deny for example, the success of the Roman Catholic Church which relies, for its moral effects, upon such optic appeals to the senses, and upon the ease with which transitory feelings can be transmuted into axioms of conduct. Do you deny this?"

"Not at all. I have seen enough of their system

to realize its extreme simplicity."

"And then think of the peculiar history of this island and its situation as a converging-point for men of every race and every creed. All these things stimulate to rapid nervous discharges; that is, to inconsidered, foolish actions——"

"All fools!" the boatman interrupted. "All foreigners! We people don't do these things. Only dam-fool foreigners. That so, gentlemens. They have trouble themselves, then they come to this rock and, boom! make trouble for their friends."

"Boom!" echoed his son, who had apparently caught the drift of the old man's speech. Whereat the two Greek genii in the stern laughed immoderately; knowing, as they did, that the boy had not the slightest idea of what his father was talking about.

"Boom!" they repeated, in derisive chorus.

At that moment all the occupants of the boat pricked up their ears. A sound had reached them, a similar sound—a sound that recalled the distant firing of a big gun. Boom! It reverberated among the rocks. The rowers dropped their oars. Everyone listened.

The sound came again. This time there was no question as to its origin. It was artillery, beyond a doubt.

The old soldier had grown preternaturally grave.

"*Il cannone del duca,*" he said.

The cannon of the Good Duke Alfred, never used save on urgent or solemn occasions, was being discharged.

Then the boatman made another remark, in Italian to Keith.

"What does he say?" asked Mr. Heard.

"He thinks they must be calling out the militia."

Something was very wrong, up yonder, on the marketplace.

End of Volume I